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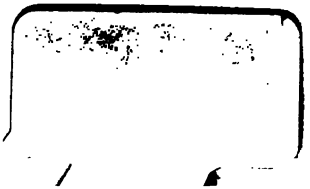

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WOLFINE

WOLFINE

A Romance in which a Dog Plays an Honorable Part

BY

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STURGIS & WALTON COMPANY
1915

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WOLFINE

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PART I

CHAPTER I

BOY AND GIRL

THE year 1710 saw Ireland free of the last wolf within her borders. These fierce marauders who had for centuries been the curse of her folk, infesting her plains and her forests, terrorising alike both man and beast, and ever demanding their toll of blood to the very threshold of the homestead, had disappeared—their memory kept alive by nursery rhyme and bogie tale. The renowned strain of still more savage dogs, man's instrument in their extermination, their usefulness in turn gone by, were allowed to become nearly extinct; and not until the middle of the last century was the noble breed of the Irish wolf-hound revivified.

Upon a glorious autumn day in the year 1896, Wolfine, a true descendant of the old stock, her blue blood stamped in every curve of her well-proportioned frame, lay stretched beneath a wide-spreading pine. Her curved, flexible, muscular neck tapered from the deep, wide chest. Gracefully arched loins, joined to strong, powerful thighs and hocks, the driving power of her great weight, supported the well drawn up belly, and the long straight back of thirty inches height—all

clothed with rough, hard, whitish hair. Nearby, with hands clasped above and pillowing his head, lay peacefully sleeping a young man, his bared, sun-tanned, muscular arms, and well-knit athletic frame half concealed in their bed of bracken. Further on, an open book in her lap, her back supported by a fallen hemlock, sat a young girl, indolently tossing stray bits of stick and moss into the pebbled brook which coursing by her side was shortly lost in the broader stream beyond. Both man and dog were good to look upon—the embodiments of physical force, of power and sinewy strength. The girl, in striking contrast, was but a slender wraith, with thin, pale cheeks, her features drawn and pinched, her eyes hidden by the dark glasses covering them, and her hair entirely concealed by a white cambric cap. Yet her face reflected a rare individuality, so very charming in its sweetness, so full of content, of cheer and happiness,—so gladsome with the joy of life.

The scene was set in the secluded woodlands of Maine, midst pines and rugged hemlocks interspersed with wide-girthed shade trees of beech and oak and maple, which, sloping downwards from the high river bank, darkened the waters beneath, foam-crested and deep, as they swirled along. Across the stream, at an elevation above the gaudy autumn plumage, and on a wooded bluff that rose straight and precipitous from the banks, a crudely fashioned log hut was partly visible—which the man, when still a boy, had built with what aid the girl could offer.

The girl's eyes turned towards her companion gazing with admiration, love and affection at his attractive face, which, kind and strong though boyish still, gave promise of the fuller manhood knocking at the door. Extending her thin, slim hand towards the dog, she

stroked the grizzled head; whereat Wolfine, as if in full and perfect understanding with the girl's thoughts, offered her her paw and whined in recognition. At this the man awoke, when playfully seizing hold of the great beast, he roughly clinched her by either side of her pointed jaw. Then for a few minutes the two swayed back and forth, the dog snorting and rolling back her lips, while the man, now on his knees, faced her with unrelaxed grip, putting forth his full strength.

"Oh, don't, Jack! It frightens me. Please stop!" the girl begged him.

"Come here, Wolfine! Here, I say—here!"

The dog with a quick jerk of her powerful neck, twisted herself free from her opponent's grasp; then, after bounding from one to the other, barking with excitement, lay down quietly with her head in the girl's lap. The man rose to his feet and began shaking the leaves and dirt from his clothes.

"There's nothing to worry about, Kiddie," he averred laughing; "it's only her way of playing;" and then picking up her book where it lay on the ground, he seated himself by her side.

The dog was Kate's, and between the two existed a very unusual and close relation. About two years previously, one Christmas day, an Englishman, and old friend of her father, had sent her the dog; then but a diminutive, half-grown puppy, captious and unmanageable. By slow degrees, and with infinite patience, the child had educated the restive beast in its relationship to society, winning for herself first the creature's wholesome respect, and then its constantly increasing affection. And now the full-grown dog, well controlled, her mighty physique and extraordinary intelligence under the domination of one who was still but a child, had

become that child's close friend as well as self-constituted protector. Towards the rest of the household, as also with strangers, she was invariably sociable and friendly, appearing to like, rather than to tolerate, the acquaintances she made. But between her and her mistress developed a certain mutual understanding, and by day they were generally to be found together. Aristocrat that she was, she seemed to know by finest instinct, and might have told in canine speech, the status and the quality of all she met; of man and beast alike. She was high-born and high-bred, and disdained to fraternize, still more to mate, beneath her station.

The sun had lost somewhat of its power, when they started for the river bank, where launching the light skiff moored above the rapid waters, they crossed the stream and trolled for fish beneath the shaded banks; the boy paddling, and the girl tending the long lines streaming out behind. Meanwhile the dog paced even with them along the shore, eager and alive to any interest of her friends, and showing her delight at every fish they took.

Later they returned to their picnic ground, and were making ready to leave, when Kate as she passed by stooped and stretched out her hand to stroke Wolfine. The dog rose on her haunches in answer to the girl's touch; but the low guttural of response was checked by a sudden forward lifting of the grandly carried head, a quick cocking of the small ears and dilating of the delicate nostrils, as the fierce dark eyes, beneath the long wiry hair sweeping from the forehead, concentrated on a broad stretch of water far up to windward.

CHAPTER II

THE BATTLE

FAR up in the air, floating over the bright woodlands, and above the tall storm-swept pines sailed the king of birds, an American eagle. His white head and tail glistening in the sun, the motion of his wings scarcely visible to the eye, he poised, and then, with shorter sweep and quicker motion, gradually lowered his flight in ever narrowing circles. Suddenly, his wings snapping with swift motion close to his sides, he dropped, like a stone thrown from on high, upon an object floating toward the outlet.

Wolfine, her muscles tense and trembling with suppressed excitement, glanced at Kate, whose restraining hand had not yet reached the dog's head, before an encouraging word from Jack let loose the control that held in check the long lithe frame, and she sprang forward. The bird, having missed its first stroke, was gathering itself in upward flight in preparation for another attempt. On the water floated a partly sunken and unbalanced crate. This had evidently been the prop of a half-grown puppy, whose head could just be seen bobbing up and down, as with frantic efforts it made for the shore. The eagle might well have caught it then and there, now that it was separated from its support, whose rocking to and fro in the light breeze had probably saved the pup's life at the bird's first attempt. But the eagle seemed to prefer an easier capture, and circling overhead with even, steady swing,

bided the time when its victim should have reached the shore. At last, the puppy, nearing the banks, and well spent with fright and fatigue, crouched in the shallows with piteous, helpless cries, trembling at its fate. Again the great bird began to circle in descent. Again it shot downward in sure triumphant swoop, its prey assured. But just as the steel-like claws opened to sink themselves into the furry back, like a flash of light a long quivering body launched itself from the low bank above the water's edge. The bird's aim deflected, its sharp talons fastened in a vice-like grip upon the neck of Wolfine. Beating fierce and rapid blows with its great wings, the eagle drew back its head —to strike the sight forever from the dog's eyes.

But the heritage of centuries had not been reckoned on, nor had any past experience warned the royal bird of the defensive methods of its foe. Before the cruel beak could rise and fall, Wolfine with rapid twist had turned completely over, her four feet gathered close along her sides. Then, like a conjurer's sleight of hand, and with movement quicker than the eye could follow, her jaw had snapped and closed upon the descending neck.

With great difficulty the dog disengaged herself from the talons of her vanquished foe. At last she shook herself free, and looked about. The puppy, some distance off, was helplessly struggling in the centre of the current and being gradually forced towards the rapids. Wolfine made one spring out into the deeper water; and then, quickly, her intent changing with extraordinary readiness, she turned, and bounded splashing towards the shore, to course along its banks. Arriving at a point at the water's edge which lay at right angles to where the rapids first began, with powerful

sure-footed springs she reached the nearest of the flat rocks bordering the narrow channel. Here she halted, and crouching at full length on the wet slippery surface, the spray beating in her face, her long hind legs drawn far back as counter balance to her extended head and shoulders, she waited still and motionless. The puppy, rapidly swept downwards, had from the first been powerless, caught in the embrace of the current rushing faster and faster towards the narrow gateway leading to the rapids. Immovable as the boulders which surrounded her, Wolfine awaited its coming. Then, at the moment it swung past, with one quick powerful motion of her paw, she swept it to safety by her side.

Meanwhile the girl and boy had been entranced, if helpless spectators. When the puppy was saved, Kate in a passion of relief, exaltation and delight, flung herself into Jack's arms, crying out:

"O, Jack! What a darling dog! Could anything—anything have been more splendid?"

Wolfine's skilful strategies had been successful; the narrow margin of hope had in each case been crowned with fullest success. The puppy, awakened to its surroundings, was sitting on its haunches, chilled, forlorn and bedraggled, the while uplifting its blunted snout to howl as if its heart would break. Despite the ungrateful snarling and vicious snapping of the little beast, Wolfine, dexterously catching it, began picking her way slowly back, until, with great dignity, she laid the pup at Kate's feet, and looking up besought her approbation.

The team which was to take them home, having arrived, Wolfine refused to be helped until the pup had first been stowed away beneath the seats. Finally as

they were about to depart, the distant note of a man's voice breaking on the stillness of the late afternoon, was borne along from beyond a promontory, which, jutting out into the stream far below, made a bend in the river at that point. By degrees the full rolling rhythm of a woodland melody rang out in increasing volume, and directly a birch canoe came into view, rounding the headland. Its occupant was a thickset man, his reddish brown hair uncovered, and his sleeves rolled up, who was leisurely, but with swift and deft strokes paddling up the stream.

As the last words of his song echoed on the still air, the singer approached the swifter current below the rips, whence with left knee braced against the second bar, and right foot thrown well behind, slowly, inch by inch, he began working the bow of the canoe forward, tacking sidewise to the current, until his eye,—long practised in the language of running waters, that told of hidden rock, of deep or shallower spot, of broken currents or more dangerous path,—had chosen the safest channel for his way. Then with the judgment of long practice and experience, first edging slowly here, then driving quickly there, he forced his cranky craft with seeming ease steadily upwards through the boiling waters, the alternate swing of bow and stern obedient to his will, until with final shove he shot out swiftly into calmer currents, and made the shore.

CHAPTER III

THE SERPENT

"IT'S that Mr. Craig. He's staying with the Judge. Shall we invite him to come with us?" Jack whispered, a look of annoyance on his face.

"Yes, I suppose we've got to be polite."

Jack, from the edge of the bank, called down to the newcomer:

"Hello, there! Mr. Craig! Do you want a lift?"

The canoe-man, who had brought his craft within the shelter of the trees, and having turned it over was covering it with branches, looked quickly up, touching his hat as he recognised Kate.

"Thanks, Ingersoll. And how do you do, Miss Marston, I am glad to see you out and about, young lady."

He approached the team, reaching forward to deposit in the wagon a bundle he had with him, but on seeing the dogs stowed in behind, distinctly hesitated, and for an instant paused. Then, as the puppy's head was somewhat in the way, he struck it sharply on the snout, quickly withdrawing his hand. The puppy instinctively following his retreat, snapped at his assailant, and bit him severely in the wrist. Startled by this unexpected counter, the man jumped back. But when he felt the sharp growing pain in his wrist, and spied the little mongrel retreating under the seat snarling and showing its teeth, he stopped to seize a short stick lying beneath the wagon, and, with an oath, lifted his arm to strike.

But the blow never fell, for he looked into the savage eyes of Wolfine, who had slipped noiselessly forward until her head and shoulders stretched over the tail-board, and her great fangs were almost at his throat. His face turned white, and the weapon fell from his hand.

Jack caught Wolfine by the collar, who slunk down at the quick chiding of her mistress, but kept her eyes on her opponent, who could not be persuaded, despite all regrets and apologies, to come near the wagon again. He preferred, tired as he was, traversing the long distance back on foot, to bringing himself in nearer proximity to the cause of his fear. For the sudden unexpectedness of it all might have disquieted any man, but with him it produced an unreasonable superstitious fear of present danger; a prophecy of coming evil—intangible and deadly.

So Craig was left to foot it back alone; nursing the while his throbbing arm, and roundly cursing his luck and the cur who bit him. The arm, moreover, soon swelled to such a degree, and became so painful, that he was forced to hurry to the village and take the first train to where he could procure proper advice and treatment. As he hastened through the darkness, his most poignant suffering was the shock caused by his dog-fear; and not till the break of day did sleep remove from his sight the vision of Wolfine's fangs.

Meanwhile the boy and girl had started homeward with the living flotsam they had rescued, little imagining the far reaching consequences of the day's events.

Judge Eggleston was a bachelor, and lived alone. His home was in New York. But the old homestead at Dorset was always kept open and ready to receive him.

Here he made his yearly summerings, besides intermittent visits of a few days at a time, when the opportunity offered. Craig's relations with the Judge were at first merely political. As time went on the elder man conceived a stronger and more personal liking for his young friend, whose abilities were pronounced and whose company was excellent. He had never felt called upon to investigate his guest's private life or character, but accepted him for what he seemed, and as a welcome addition in the lonely evenings. Their business acquaintance originated from the fact that the Judge's office was an elective one, and its tenure dependent on political conditions. As usual in such cases, the Judge looked chiefly for results, and the requisite votes at the right time. The details he left entirely with Craig, cheerfully paying what was assessed—never an exorbitant sum. He made such subscriptions merely as a party duty. Nor did he attempt in any way to inform himself of the general principle that controlled their distribution. He disliked practical politics, and had never in the least associated its evils with himself. That his position was in any way dependent on a single man, on a local boss, on a Tammany leader of advanced rank and remarkable cleverness, who held the district in the hollow of his hand, never occurred to him. Had he suspected that the real influence which guided his more active constituents was, in very truth, the protective mantle with which his high standing shielded through its open friendship one of the leaders of the lowest constituency of America's most populous city, he would have been paralysed with shame and anger. Nor would his wrath and mortification have been lessened, had he been aware how fully the "gang" banked on this knowledge, and that they played upon a charity which they held to be a weakness, which they

mocked at, and which at the same time constituted the main bulwark of protection to the accomplishment of their evil schemes.

And what did Craig himself, a gentleman born and bred, make out of it all? Nothing, as most grafters interpret boodle. He had no craving for office—as such. Nor was his reward in any way a pecuniary one. Indeed, it cost him a very handsome sum every year—which he could well afford—to keep his hold. His recompense was complex. On the one hand was the fruition of his greed for power and the prestige it gave; added to which was a love of being in the game and shaping others' fortunes. But more than all, it gave him the widest scope to pander to his selfish desires and vicious longings. He had been educated in the most rigorous and exacting of church schools, yet on entering college he seemed to lose most of the better and restraining influences of his boyhood's days, and began quickly to deteriorate. He ran the whole gamut of a vicious student's life—and then finished with a *cum laude!* He became in part a blackguard, and in part a strong and forceful man. And such he still remained, a little of the veneer rubbed off, but most capable of making himself acceptable when and where he chose. His private life, if known, would have hopelessly banished him from the paths of decent men.

Thus a turning point had come this October day in Wolfine's life. Strong, gentle, trusting, dignified and patient; a friend of every member of the human circle in which she lived; polite; a dog of memory and manners; known and admired the length and breadth of a township, Wolfine had made her first enemy,—and knew it.

CHAPTER IV

THE GRANGE

ON a broad plateau, midway between the base and highest reach of a succession of terraced and partially cultivated slopes—where the rising ground in the rear, with its undulating hills and scattering areas of forest shielded it from the heavier winds as they swept from the north—stood a picturesque dwelling, known throughout the country-side as "The Parson's," and named by its owner, the Rev. Robert Jeffries Marston, "The Grange." The original structure, consisting of two stories and a roof, and built many decades past, presented from the outside no greater attraction of design than its claim to absolute simplicity. Resting upon an underpinning of coarse old-fashioned brick, at a height of two feet from the surface of the ground, with clapboarded sides, narrow casements and small square-paned windows, it remained in most respects a typical example of the traditional American farmhouse, as first fashioned by our grandsires a century and more ago. The Grange, however, no longer flared its aforetime coating of brilliant red against the landscape, but was clothed in soft grey, with trimmings in white. The windows, too, were framed with dark green blinds; and at the entrance on the east, the rough slabs of granite, which, unprotected by any railing, had for a century done duty for steps, were replaced by a covered and more modern approach.

To the original structure, and from the outside harmonising therewith in character and simplicity, had been added an extension towards the west. This consisted of one story, with an elevation reaching to the windows of the second story of the old building—its walls covered with creepers and clinging vines. At the western end, a covered porch facing the long gradient towards the distant valley beneath, overlooked hillsides of forest and scattered farms, with sheep and cattle browsing in the open. From here, too, the eye rested on a broad lake, reflecting the shadows of oak and maple and greenwood tree, and fed by the mountain springs and streams converging from either side—one source of the ever widening river dropping lower and lower through the valley till lost in the distance. On coming into the house from the east, one faced at the further end of the long hall, protected by sliding doors and heavy hangings, the formal approach to the annex, or library, as it was called. Inasmuch as this room with its appointments, was somewhat unique, it may not be amiss to give to its description fuller consideration.

The entrance opened upon a room about sixty-five feet long and forty feet wide, with a studding fifteen feet high to support the roofing, which curved upwards in the form of a Norman arch to the centre. Midway on the right, the keyboard of an organ built into an embrasure in the wall, ran flush with the side. On the left, and directly opposite, an alcove had been built, the dark woodwork of which, framing a large stationary pane of plate glass in the centre, pictured a landscape of wooded hill and vale,—dotted here and there with the shimmer of pond and sparkling brook,—which gradually rose from the slope below upwards and ever higher and grander to the mountains beyond, to be finally lost

amidst the haze of the towering peaks which marked the boundary line of New Hampshire.

On either side of this recess, and of the organ opposite, long, tall and somewhat narrow double mullioned windows, diamond paned, and draped by rich green damask hangings harmonising in shade and texture with the furniture and the dark polished oak with which the entire apartment was panelled, gave access to every shifting light and sunshine. Shelves let into the walls, and covering all available space, were lined with books, many volumes rare and beautifully bound—a book-lover's and a scholar's lifetime collection. A long library table, holding several vases of flowers and covered with writing materials, pamphlets and papers in daily use, stood in the centre. Large, soft-toned rugs hid much of the surface of the highly polished floor; and here and there were richly-carved and highly ornamental chairs, and attractive old tables—on some of which were works of art, on others mementos of personal value; and everywhere, flowers. Opposite the entrance and towards the westerly porch, two pedestals, reduced copies of ancient columns, supported marble figures—masterpieces of modern artistic skill. Broad divans, buried in pillows, backed against the windows; and luxurious, inviting, and low deep-seated chairs covered with old Spanish leather, stood about. The farther end of the room opened upon a wide piazza circling round the westerly side of the house, with steps running its entire curved length, and leading upon a terraced garden. In the centre of the partition, separating the old house from the annex, was a fireplace, in whose panelling above the Venetian mantel was placed a full length crayon portrait of a lady. To the right, a door gave entrance to a room jutting out into the hall. This was prettily

papered and carpeted; its white woodwork, tinted ceiling and dainty coverings, with lightly modelled chairs and tables, contrasting sharply with the heavier furnishings of the adjoining library. This was Kate Marston's particular sanctum.

When, some fourteen years earlier, Mr. Marston, a cultured scholar of ample means, pastor of a growing parish, had suddenly and utterly broken down, crushed by the death of his wife, skilled physicians urged upon him that he must exchange the city for a quieter home of higher elevation. The command was reinforced by his necessity to his little Kate, whose first breath was a cry to the passing spirit of the mother whose life had been the sacrifice. Many a summer had he visited for a few days at a time, at the old homestead—on the upper shore of the lake and midway between the Grange and the plain below—his life-long friend and contemporary, Judge Eggleston. On these occasions the Parson's favourite walk was to the plateau on which the Grange now stood; and the recollection of its beauty, went far towards his final decision to become possessor of the spot and make it his home.

Here he had now lived for nearly fifteen years, devoting himself to his child; and carrying on a true missionary work amongst the villages and outlying farms throughout the country-side; ever tactful and ready to help, revered and beloved by all. And so the years had sped, and the nurture and education of the child, with the help of the best governesses that could be procured, progressed, on lines often contrary to conventional modern ideas, but in a manner made necessary by the circumstances which surrounded her. With very few exceptions, her experiences and contact with the world were confined within the horizon that encircled the

Grange. Beyond this her vision had been enlarged only by an occasional visit in later years to Judge Eggleston's home in New York, and an annual summer trip with her father to New Brunswick, to a salmon stream near the Bay of Chaleur. A diligent reader, she had learned much in her father's library of the world's life—and in a better, cleaner and sounder way, of its ambitions, its temptations, its humour and its tragedies—than most girls educated in the larger companionship of one of our great cities. And no purer, no mentally less defiled, no more exquisitely refined little lady ever lived. If she missed the companionship of playmates of her own age and station, full realisation of the lack had never come to her. Her sorrows were mostly for others, and those touching herself, transient; while her interests, if in one sense somewhat limited, were nevertheless absorbing,—foremost of them all being her love for her father.

But Mr. Marston had long been distrustful of what the future had in store. He was filled with anxious care lest in the inevitable awakening from the happiness incident to her childhood, she would, as she grew older, feel the want of more friends and a wider acquaintance, and perhaps not fully appreciate the necessities which had denied them to her. Nor, he feared, would such forced seclusion leave her prepared for the time when he was no longer with her, and she had to face, alone, a world of which she had no personal experience. And this was his most poignant anxiety. He had hoped they would pass the coming winter abroad; but now they must put it off on account of Kate's recent illness, from which she was still convalescing. Her eyes had to be protected from the light for some time, and he knew that she would never under any circumstances become recon-

ciled to exchanging the clean white cap which covered her closely cropped hair, for a temporary artificial wig. She had been an extremely pretty child, and doubtless knew the fact, if only in a vague way; so that her natural vanity would be piqued on being introduced amongst strangers before her face had recovered from its pallor, her frame regained its strength, and she appeared, in part at least, more like her normal self. But in this, as in all his troubles, he strove to believe that it was all for the best, to reconcile his mind to the life that was ordered him, and to school his wishes to a higher will.

CHAPTER V

THE FOSTER CHILD

THE puppy had been in the house but a day or two, when it was generally admitted to be a nuisance to master and domestic alike. Whatever its history, it was patent that the ungainly, little, yellow, coarse and thin-haired creature, was a mongrel cur through and through. It proved this both in disposition and appearance, and presumably had well earned the watery exit and the oblivion from which Wolfine rescued it. When allowed its own way it was amiable enough; but cross it in its purpose, and it replied by a snap of its wicked little teeth, and then cowered under the protection of Wolfine. At the outset it was utterly ungovernable. If tied up, and away from Wolfine, it would generally manage to slip its collar, or gnaw in two the cord that confined it; and, failing in this, it would sit on its haunches and howl, until it forced its release or Wolfine came. The welfare of the puppy seemed continually on the older dog's mind, and she unmistakably idolised her new acquisition with a maternal affection. Yet notwithstanding the fact that she was always at the puppy's command, whether for a romp or a hunt for mouse or squirrel, or whatever else the quest might be, she evidently had certain preconceived ideas in regard to the way a dog-child should be brought up and disciplined. It soon became apparent that there were two

sides to their relationship. Dogs have in their general makeup, and in the character and dispositions with which they are conditioned, an extraordinary knack of assimilating the tone of their surroundings, till it becomes the controlling influence in their behaviour. Now Wolfine was, for a dog, very much of a lady; and for a dog, and if one might judge by dog codes, was fully alive to her responsibilities as a foster mother. She had herself been reared in a well-bred family, and was the constant daily companion and personal friend of the daughter of the house, and had unquestionably imbibed in a certain way, and as far as her dog possibilities would allow, a similarity of conventional status. Before long, there were definite limits established to the puppy's increasing bullying of her foster mother, and he began to learn that there was a distinction between genteel and unmannerly behaviour on his part. If he became too presuming or rough in his play, a dexterous bunt from the shoulder, or a quick sidewise swing of Wolfine's head, would roll him sprawling over in a manner that very soon began to bear fruit. One example of canine schooling especially entertained Jack. Wolfine was so restless and uneasy when away from her new care, that Kate often allowed the latter to accompany Jack and herself on their walks and picnics. It was on one of these occasions, that a small dog, although older and probably more experienced, which they met on the road, had an altercation with the puppy—and soon the dust began to fly. The bout was a fairly even one, and, much to Jack's and the girl's astonishment, Wolfine made no movement to interfere in behalf of her charge, but stood watching the round with eager eyes till the stranger dog was put to flight. She then came up with wagging tail to lick the other's wounds, cooing over it with an unmistakable

air of pride and approval. In numberless ways Wolfine evidenced her appreciation of what was required of her, and of her duties as a good dog-mother, till finally the puppy became fairly well behaved after the manner of dogs,—at least in company,—and ceased to be the nuisance in the household which he had been at first. No dog lover can fail to recognise the animal's natural vanity and love of commendation, as well as peculiar sensitiveness to ridicule. The effect on Wolfine of her assumed relationship was at once apparent. She evidenced a profound pride in her foster child; possibly as being her own property, belonging in no part to another, and acquired for her by no one else.

A bright sunny morning, a few weeks after Wolfine's battle with the eagle, found Kate seated on the steps of the westerly porch, from which the garden led away in a succession of descending terraces. By her side was Jack, and while they talked, he pondered over the change her illness had wrought. A feeling of tenderness stirred within him, as he viewed her pale, narrow face. In vain did he search for the sturdy child with the frank blue eyes, with the dimpled cheeks and golden ringlets. He had parted but a year since from a jolly, fairy comrade, buoyant with life and health; and now his boyhood's little friend, recovering from a virulent typhoid, taller, frail, and changed by time and fever, seemed in form and features lost beyond recall.

"You must have had a pretty tough time of it, Kate."

"Oh, they say I was terribly ill."

"And to think I was away and never knew a thing about it,—not until you were out of danger and getting well."

"You were gone a long time, Jack," she sighed.

"Yes, much longer than I originally intended to be. You see I hitched up with a surveying party, which started into the woods just as soon as the ice broke up in May. I was after trout in northern Quebec, you know. I took only one man with me; and it would have been such a jolly tough job for the pair of us to work our way back alone, that we waited until the others were sending out for provisions, and went along with them."

"And came directly home?"

"No, I didn't hurry. There was nothing to make me."

"What luck did you have?"

"Fishing? Oh, it was great; and we had a ripping good time, too. I'll tell you all about it some day. So I did not get back and join my mother in New York until August—much later than I expected. But tell me, what's that you're humming, Kate?" She did not answer him at first, continuing the refrain; the words becoming more distinct as she raised her voice:

'Adieu mon seul amour
Adieu je verse les larmes
A toi mon espoir a moi
Ton coeur en attendant
Mon retour—'

There, I forget the rest. Dear me! Where did I hear it, you asked? Norna taught it to me."

"Norna? Who is Norna?"

"Why, Norna Boudré. Oh, I forgot, you don't know. Father got her to come home with us last June, when I was taken ill on the river. She lives somewhere near Bathurst. It's a French song."

"Yes, I know; a Canadian boat song," he said ab-

sently; and a moment later taking up the words where she had left off, he finished the verse:

> "—Ta penser
> Me suivera toujours
> A travers les flot,
> Prie bien Dieu qui t'aime
> Toujours 'vec ton fidéle matelot."

Kate turned to him in astonishment:

"Where in the world did you ever learn that?"

Apparently he did not hear her, and she asked him again:

"Where did you hear it, Jack?"

"Where? Why, why,—the guide I was with last summer used to sing it. But tell me about this Norna. Did she make good?"

"Good? She saved my life. She stayed on until I was well—and after. You can't imagine how devoted she was to me. Didn't you ever meet her at Bathurst, —Norna Boudré?"

"No, I never saw her."

"Why, you must have. She used often to pole up the river, with her father and bring the mail to camp. Don't you remember? She must have come, sometime, when you were with us."

Her companion looked troubled, and it was several moments before he answered:

"No, I think not. I should have remembered it if she had, for I know her father well, and have made many a long trip with him. Moreover, I have an uncommon liking and respect for him—but am sure I never met the daughter. At all events I have forgotten it. I suppose she writes to you?"

"That's the queerest part of it. She promised she would and doesn't. I've written her several times and

received no answer. I've worried a lot about her. She may be sick, again."

"Sick?"

"Yes, she wasn't very well when she left."

"When did she leave?"

"The last of July. You ought to see her, Jack! She is so splendid looking! Father says she is the handsomest type of a gypsy. The nurses were sent away, and she did everything for me,—all alone; and then she broke down and was ill herself for some days. I was a good deal better by that time and could walk about, so I turned nurse myself—or tried to. If I was away from her very long she missed me so that she cried. We didn't want her to leave us at all; but she said that she ought to go home, as her father, who had been away, was expected back. I hated to part with her."

"Let me know when you do hear from her."

"Yes; and I'll write her again the first thing to-morrow."

"And be sure to let me have the first news you get—won't you?"

Again she promised, grateful for his interest.

"Look!" Kate exclaimed after a pause, and pointing to a raft of geese high in the heavens, steadily travelling their southbound course in V shaped alignment.

"It's the very last flock you'll see till the springtime," she sighed. "And the home birds have about gone—nearly all of them. There is scarcely a robin left. You can't imagine how much I miss them. I haven't heard a song-bird for—" She stopped suddenly, catching a soft note from a nearby shrub. "Why, it's a winter wren! Oh, I love them so! It must have come to-day. Now, keep quiet, and listen."

For some minutes one might have supposed she was talking to the bird in its own language, bringing it closer and closer, till an unconscious movement from Jack put it to flight.

"Oh, Jack! But never mind. I'll make up with it some other time."

The interruption cheered her for a while; but later, after a longer silence than usual between them, she said disconsolately:

"It's no use, Jack; I've got the blues."

"You? What's up, Kiddie?"

"Everything else seems to have them, too. Just look at those flowers! They are all frost bitten; there's nothing left, alive. Did you ever see things so miserable looking? And then you are going away so soon. That is at the bottom of it, I guess. I don't see how I can stand it."

"Oh, no. Not so bad as that," he said kindly. "But I am awfully sorry to leave. You know I can't help myself; and the worst of it is I'm in for a long pull, I fear —about a year and a half, as near as I can make out. It all depends on mother's health.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I forgot. How awfully selfish of me," she cried, laying her hand on his.

"It is nothing new, Kate; only the Doctor says she must get away in order to keep well. However, we don't start yet—not till the last of the month."

"But what a terrible long time—and you'll write to me often, won't you? Sure now, Jack?"

"Yes, if you like. I'll try—that is; though I'm not much on writing. I was always a duffer at that sort of thing."

"And you won't forget about me, Jack; not the least little bit, will you?" and her voice had a tear in it.

"I'm not likely to, Kiddie—how could I?"

"No," she answered, with a wry face, "I suppose not. I'm such a fright you couldn't very well. I hate to have you think of me as I am now."

"Don't talk nonsense, goosie. I shall recall you often on this very spot, amongst the birds and flowers."

"Oh! I adore them so."

"Yes, and with that funny Shaker Bonnet, and your apron, basket, gloves and scissors, and your fierce arguments with James—patient old cuss, who is probably right, but finally gives in when you've worn him out."

Kate laughed. "For a fact, I believe he never really gives in. He is too obstinate."

"Perhaps. But I shall picture meeting you here the first thing when I return; right here; with the same old rig; but with real eyes, and beautiful curls peeping from the sides of your bonnet, Kiddie; and that pale face turned to roses, your tilted nose gorgeous with freckles, and—"

"Do leave out the freckles, Jack!"

"Not much; you always had freckles; and I always swore I liked them—indeed, I do—and I shall want to see my old Kiddie again. Let me see; it will be in the early summertime, in June, here amongst the birds and flowers; and you'll be strong and well—the sweetest rosebud in the lot. How's that?"

"By the way, how about those theatricals you and Nat were going to lug me in on?" he asked suddenly.

At once she became animated, her face lighting up as she replied:

"Oh, we're to have a dress rehearsal Thanksgiving Day, and the real show a few days later. It will be such fun!"

"Thanksgiving Day? That's too late for me. I must

leave for New York the day after, to attend to a lot of things, and shall be back just barely in time to fetch mother and say good-bye. You'd better count me out."

"No, no, you can't back out now. That would spoil everything. We'll fix it somehow. It's only charades, you know. Nat says we can learn our parts in five minutes. So you'll have nothing to bother about after the first rehearsal. You have only one scene, anyway."

"Where do I come in?"

"You and I are to be Lochinvar and the bride,—the one he ran away with, and—"

"What became of the other one—I want all I can get."

"Stop being foolish, Bluebeard, and listen to me. We meet a travelling monk who marries us, after which—"

"Heaven save us, Kate! There'll be no afterwards! What are you stringing me for? I shall look like a first-class jackass!"

"Well, of course that's up to you," she retorted demurely. "But don't look so cross, Jack. You and I have only to do the final scene, the whole word, in that one charade,—'Matrimony,' they call it."

"Where does Nat come in?"

"He's the monk. And you're to wear the suit of armour in the hall; and Aunt Emily has lent me a lovely dress, with a train and a long lace veil."

"How am I going to spring on a horse with all that iron on, and you in my arms into the bargain, train and lace, and—"

"Now behave, Jack."

"And mother's in the plot, too, is she? All right, then," he said good naturedly. "Have it any way you like; only do make it short."

CHAPTER VI

THE BRUTE

SHORTLY before Thanksgiving, Craig came to the Grange to see the Judge, who was visiting there, and to spend the day. He was by no means an unwelcome guest, for he was an excellent raconteur, and could make himself most agreeable when he would. Jack never particularly fancied him; less than ever, since the scene with the puppy. Jack had witnessed the act, which Kate had done only in part; and never felt any sorrow for the retribution, the effects of which had kept Craig's arm in a sling for a fortnight.

The bright sun of the early afternoon lured the young couple for a long walk, while the rest of the party started to visit the Judge's farm, leaving Craig, his business finished, behind, so as to catch the train back to New York. He refused to have a conveyance ordered, preferring to go on foot, and later started for the station, having in his hand a stout and pliable malacca cane. He had left the avenue, intending to make a short cut across the fields, when he came suddenly upon Wolfine and the puppy at the extreme end of the garden. Wolfine, a few days previously, had badly cut her foot, and was tied by a short heavy chain to the dog-house, hidden to view from the house by the shrubs which in part surrounded it. As the man approached Wolfine raised herself, her hair bristling, while the puppy, a short distance to one side, and tied by a long rope, began to growl and show its teeth. Craig, startled, and

trembling with that inherent fear of dogs which always unnerved him, took a wide circuit in his approach to the gate which opened from the enclosed garden, at the same time shaking his stick menacingly at the puppy. The latter, emboldened by the man's deflection and his evident fear, made a rush at him, to be brought up suddenly by the tautened rope and thrown violently backwards—when with more chastened spirit he flew to the protection of Wolfine. But in doing so, he swerved sufficiently to run into a light hand cart standing in the line of his retreat, throwing it over, and entangling himself in his confusion, so that he could only jump forwards and back within a narrow circle. Craig, who had by now reached the entrance, regained sufficient courage to pause and look back, his hand on the half opened gate. Then, as he saw the predicament of the puppy, and realised that no one was in sight, the cruel instincts of the man took full possession of him.

Except for Wolfine the puppy was absolutely at his mercy. For a space he watched the elder dog, who, perceiving the danger her charge was in, strove to set herself free. No sound escaped her, save the deep wheezing of her indrawing breath as she strained with all her mighty strength to break her bonds. But the staple which held one end of her chain was riveted through heavy deal, and the other end was carried around her neck and over and under her collar; and the more frantically she strove to break or pull it off, the more it choked and weakened her. And then the other animal, at the gate, saw his opportunity a safe one. With a nasty, set smile upon his face, and stick tightened in his clasp, he leisurely approached the puppy as it lay helpless, whimpering and cowering on its back, and proceeded deliberately to knock the life out of it. At the

first blow, as if all the furies of hell were let loose, the tortured heart of Wolfine broke forth in frenzy. With mad infuriate effort she struggled, backing, pulling, jerking first here, then there, till at last she loosened the heavy wooden house, lifted it clear of its brick support, and inch by inch drew nearer to the puppy, whose cries, now feebler, and feebler still, soon died away with the stroke that told its end. Its last gasp marked the exhausted strength of Wolfine as she fell choking, her jaws dripping blood and foam, her blood-red protruding eyes blazing furious hate. And Craig, shivering again with prophetic instinct as he saw those terrible eyes, dropped his stick, and giving the dead body a parting kick, reached for his hip pocket—when Jack, coatless and hatless, rushed through the gate.

The scene that met Jack's eyes needed no explanation. The splintered cane lying beside the little yellow form, the up-turned kennel, the quivering, prostrate, gasping Wolfine, and the fierce cries which had summoned him, told their own story. With face very white, he rushed at Craig and caught his wrist as the latter drew a gun from his pocket—wrenching it from him. It exploded in the air. Indeed, there was scant resistance on Craig's part, stunned as he was by the surprise of the unexpected interference, and by the reaction coming over him. And when Jack, dropping the weapon, seized him by the throat, and, despite his oaths, struggles and blasphemous threats, forced him from the scene, he was glad to slink away and hide his face as Kate appeared. His swiftly retreating figure disappearing over the brow of the hill was the last the Grange saw of him for many a day.

Fortunately for both Kate and Jack, and especially for the former, the necessities of Wolfine demanded their

full and immediate attention. It prevented the horror and devilish cruelty of what had happened from overwhelming them. The bandages on her lamed foot had been torn off, and the partly healed wound—re-opened in her struggles—was badly extended, and filled with dirt and gravel. Her neck was also torn and bleeding, while the chain and collar tightly drawn across her throat were gradually suffocating her. Before long, however, they succeeded in bringing her round, and she staggered, half walking, half crawling, to the lifeless body beside the cart. Here she lay whining and licking the little insensate form, piteously moaning and gazing at her companions. Finally, with more rapidly returning strength, the short quick gasps gave place to deeper normal breathings. She rose to her full height, gazing wildly about and shaking her head from side to side. But soon, with hair bristling on her back above the rising withers, she drew back her thin lips, hate showing in her bloodshot eyes, and, quickly throwing up her head, gave tongue in the far reaching wail of her race. Then, stretching out her long lithe form, with nose to earth she took the trail through the garden gate.

In vain did Kate and Jack call to her; nor could living man approximate the rapid stride with which she sped. The same thought had come to them both, with cold horror at their own helplessness. Suddenly Jack pulled out his watch, and with an exclamation of relief, cried:

"She's too late! He's off! If the train was on time it has already left. Wolfine has at least a mile to go. But we ought to follow, and as fast as we can."

So off they started—meeting the dog half way on her return. To this day the agent will relate the tale of

how Wolfine came to the station, rushing up and down the long platform and circling round and round as if demented; forcing her way into his very office and amongst the sheds and freight, to turn at last slowly back across the fields, with lowered tail and drooping head.

It was a sorrowful procession that Jack led after dark towards the house. After the others returned, the disaster was told to the parson alone, whose indignation was openly expressed and without any stint, but who, out of regard for Judge Eggleston, arranged that no mention should be made to any one else of the occurrence, at least for the present.

The next day, Mr. Marston received a very politely framed note from Craig, in which that gentleman stated that he was taking the very first opportunity of advising him in regard to the most unfortunate episode that had taken place, which of course Mr. Marston would appreciate he very keenly regretted. He had struck a blow at the beast instinctively, he said, and of course without any premeditation, and to his present great sorrow at the result, and solely to stop the dog as it flew at him. "In conclusion," he finished, "I would ask your kind offices with the young people, whose excitement and sorrow as they came upon the sad scene—the details of which they had not witnessed—offer every excuse for any hasty words or action on their part."

Mr. Marston, who was convinced from the relation first given him that he had the true picture of the incident correctly in his mind, felt so enraged by the time he finished the communication, that he dare not trust himself to speak, much less to write a reply. So, tossing the letter over to Jack with an expression of contempt, he abruptly left the room. Jack read the epistle

through, and then handing it over to Kate, sat down and indited an answer over his own signature. Therein, he begged Craig to accept his profound assurance, that he, Jack, would break his d—nable neck for him if he ever showed his hypocritical face at the Grange again—and more to the same effect. He showed the letter when finished to Kate for her approval, and saying that he was going to Dorset to post it, hurried away before she had time to offer either criticism or objection, which, however, she showed no indication whatever of attempting. On his return some two hours later, his hands and shoes covered with dust and dirt, she exclaimed:

"What, for mercy sakes, have you been up to, Jack? You look as if you'd been farming."

"Nothing much," he replied with ill concealed annoyance; "I was looking for something I must have lost in the garden, and everything was in such a mess that I couldn't find it. But there! The letter's posted all right, and I'd like to see his expression when he reads what I had to say."

CHAPTER VII

THE CHARADE

THE Thanksgiving dinner at the Grange was about over. At one end of the table the pastor presided, happy at having around him so many of his dearest friends. On his right sat Jack's mother. Mrs. Ingersoll's face scarcely recorded the fifty summers of her life, which, on the whole, had been very happy ones, unmarred by excess of care or trouble. Jack, her only child, had always been a strong, healthy lad, giving her little anxiety, and reciprocating in full her unceasing devotion. A society woman in the better sense of the word, cultivated and admired wherever she went, and with much of her life from necessity passed abroad, she was never happier than when, together with Jack a guest at the Grange, she drank in the clean fresh air, and rested in the infinite peace of its hills and forests. Robert Marston, too, she had known from childhood; and then he had married Catherine Pell, with whom she had been brought up, and with whom she had that intimate relationship which younger women so often establish, and whose sentiment is never entirely obliterated. She had always loved little Kate as if she were her own child, and the full realisation of this affection was brought home to her by the girl's recent illness and the change it wrought.

Nathan Hale Gibson, a native of Dorset, was also a guest. He was about Jack's age, who regularly poked fun at him as occasion offered. But they were fast

friends nevertheless, and from early boyhood had spent many a vacation tramping the neighbouring forests together, trapping mink, muskrats and sable, and camping by distant streams at night. Jack had a great respect for the countryman, and their companionship was a mutual delight. "Nat," as he was generally called, had shown much strength of purpose, promising a fine manhood when time should have developed him. His people were the very best in the countryside, and he himself had always been a prime favourite at the Grange. Tall and ungainly in appearance, measuring six feet three inches in height, broad of chest and heavy of limb, his long legs and spare ungainly body were endowed with an enormous, clumsy strength; the whole surmounted by what Jack called his "poker face"—homely indeed in its detail, but at the same time one inviting confidence and trust. By dint of unceasing effort and the combined and unselfish economies of his family, he had acquired an excellent education, and a short time previously had been admitted to practise as a full-fledged attorney-at-law. The Judge, recognising his worth, as well as his necessities, put such business as he felt justified in his way, and Mr. Marston had followed suit.

The conversation had led to a discussion of the marriage ceremony forming part of the charades rehearsed that afternoon, when the Judge exclaimed:

"Ah! That is where the wedding march came in, which I heard being played on the organ. Whom did you marry?" he asked, his eyes twinkling as he turned to Kate. "Brother Gibson, I suppose."

"No, Jack married me! Nat was merely a monk with a long gown and cowl," she answered somewhat indignantly. "Didn't you, Jack? And he trod on my long train, which belongs to Aunt Emily's best dress; and

after he put on the ring, he stepped back and sat down over Wolfine, who at once felt there was something funny going on, and delayed the performance by not letting him up again."

Every one laughed, except the Judge; who, at first the most exuberant of all, his cheerful wholeheartedness carrying every one along with him, gradually dropped out of the conversation, casting his memory back to other stories and traditions of odd happenings at nuptial rites, and the fruit they bore. And, as he pondered, a puzzled look came into his face, and by degrees a grave and anxious one. From time to time, he looked searchingly and inquisitively, first at Jack, and then at Kate and the ring on her slender hand. Suddenly his eyes fixed themselves like a hawk's on the face of his right hand neighbour.

"Gibson," he said, lowering his voice, "were those papers passed and recorded to-day?"

"No, sir, yesterday."

"Who acknowledged them?"

"I did. As we agreed the other day that it would pay me better to be able to do such things myself, I was made a justice of the peace at once;" and he drew back a little, startled by the troubled severity of the older man's expression.

The latter made no reply, but joining in the general conversation, his practised skill soon drew out a succinct account of the rehearsal, and especially the details of the final act. When Mrs. Ingersoll rose, he covertly motioned to his host, remarking that Mr. Marston and he would remain behind, and suggesting some unfinished business for excuse. And soon they were alone, between them a tragedy or blessing—who could tell? It was within the Judge's power to lift the veil, or keeping still,

to bury in oblivion a fateful accident. But he believed the former to be his plain duty, and did not shirk it.

"Therefore to sum up," the Judge concluded an hour later, "the conditions are these: At Common Law, the man had to be at least fourteen and the woman twelve, or a marriage between them was *per se*, void. In Maine, the *lawful* time is fixed by statute at the relative ages of twenty-one and eighteen. But it has, also, been held that where one of the contracting parties to a marriage is under the statutory age, yet within the age fixed by the common law, and the marriage is formally solemnised, the relationship of man and wife exists *de facto*, is not void but voidable, and can be annulled only by a court of competent jurisdiction—unless a general statute of the state where the marriage took place pronounces such a marriage in itself void. There has been no such statute passed by a Maine Legislature, that I am aware of. And I am quite positive that Kate and Jack, respectively fifteen and twenty-three, are at this moment man and wife, or not—independently of any intention or understanding between them—strictly in accordance with a correct construction of the statutory laws of the State of Maine. The requirement of a 'notice of intentions,' to which you just alluded, is, like many other provisions, merely a primitive punitive requirement, looking to the protection of the institution of marriage and its results. Its non-observance does not in itself prevent a veritable relation existing. We are therefore faced by a status of marriage existing between the two at this moment. This the legislature might dissolve on Kate's initiative through you as her guardian, at any time before she becomes of legal age. I do not think that the same could be brought about by Jack acting alone. There is also the further alternative of divorce

proceedings later—on some prearranged ground such as desertion, or non-support. But we should at once present every detail of the case to both of them, and ascertain the position of each in the premises. It is for them in the first instance, to determine whether the marriage shall stand, or be annulled by action taken now or later."

He paused, and then continued more cheerfully: "Yet this misfortune has a certain bright side to it. Indeed it may turn out a blessing in disguise. Jack's a fine fellow—with good antecedents. Kate too, though only a child, is a pretty sturdy little character just the same, of an exceptionally cheerful and loving disposition, and surprisingly loyal in her affections. The two have been very close to each other for years. Still, what confronts us is a condition existing now, rather than the creating or allowing it."

"And you counsel what?" asked Mr. Marston, who had been completely overwhelmed by his friend's disclosure. "It must be plainly understood, however, that if the final decision is to stand by the marriage, then it must further have the sanction of Divine blessing, and be confirmed by church rites."

"Yes, I admit that fully. My advice therefore is this. Let both Kate and Jack be thoroughly instructed as to the situation, and let their decision govern. They should also, nevertheless, fully comprehend that a church ceremony, especially if performed by you, would work two ways in this case. In the first place it would undoubtedly remove all hope of legislative relief. On the other hand, however, it might strengthen their standing in court in case of future divorce proceedings, for the court could then entertain no doubt of the marriage relation existing. Otherwise, a different view than mine might be taken by the presiding justice as to the legality

of the marriage at the present time, and a decision rendered to the effect that there having been no marriage between the parties to the suit, there was no one to divorce, and therefore the case should be dismissed. The result would be that the legal status of the parties might possibly be hung up in the air, and that, too, by a dictum of the court."

And so it was finally determined that the father should put the whole matter before Kate on the morrow, and that Mrs. Ingersoll, having been informed, should at once perform a like service to her son.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PARTING

THE following morning Mr. Marston was alone in the library, and as Kate came into the room he told her that he had a very serious matter for them to talk over.

"What is it?" and she came and put her arms about him. "Nothing has happened to you, Father?" she asked, alarmed by his anxious manner.

"Sit down, dear."

"What," he continued after a pause, "would you think if Jack married you?"

"What would I think if Jack married me?" she repeated wonderingly. "What in the world do you mean, Father? Why, Jack and I mean to marry some day—when we are old enough."

For a moment her father looked at her, steadying himself the while before venturing to reply.

"Yes, but that was not in serious earnest, was it? When have you and Jack last talked about this?"

"We never talk much about it,—that is, exactly. It's just sort of there, Father. Why do you ask though?" she added, her face flushing. "Don't you want me to marry him? Nobody could be nicer than Jack. Tell me quick," she went on nervously, "what the matter is. Why do you look so frightfully grave? Has anything gone wrong? And where is Jack?" she cried, jumping up. "I'll call him. Something awful has happened, I know. I want him here."

Her father caught her arm, detaining her as she made for the door.

"Wait a moment, and let me finish what I have to say," he answered. "Marriage is a very solemn, sacred thing, Kate. When you married Jack in the play yesterday—"

"But that was only in fun. And see my ring;" she went on eagerly, pointing to a narrow circle of gold, "and on my wedding finger, too! Aunt Emily took it off her own hand. I love it. I suppose I ought to give it back to her, soon. She said I could keep it, though, if I wanted to. Do you think I might?"

"You need not take it off; that is, not quite yet, little girl. Let us just suppose, that the law held what you children did yesterday in play, to be an actual, real marriage. How would you feel about it?"

At once the humour of the thing, as it affected Jack, took full possession of her.

"Oh, my, what an awful, awful joke on Jack!" she cried in great glee. "Just think of the killing expression on Jack's face!" and she began stalking up and down the room gesticulating and imitating to a nicety how he would look and act, when her father checked her.

"Stop that at once, Kate, and pay attention to what I have to say!"

So stern was his command, and given in a tone he but seldom used, that, fearing she had done some wrong, she came and kissed him, saying she was sorry, and asking what the trouble was, and what had gone amiss.

"Come here into father's arms, while I tell you, child."

Then succinctly, and without reservation, he told her what the Judge had said, and that unquestionably she

and Jack were already, and by the law of the state, man and wife.

She gazed at him in bewilderment, dazed and confused, till a fuller comprehension coming to her, her face flushed and paled, first with vague fear, then dismay, and finally delight. Suddenly tearing herself away, her voice trembling with mixed emotions of awe, surprise and happiness, she asked:

"Do you mean that Jack and I are fully married? Now? At this very moment? Just like old people? Father, Father, I don't understand it! What shall I do? Are you sure? Is there no mistake? And Jack? I must find him quick—at once." And again she hastened to leave the room.

"No, Kate—come back, dear. I haven't finished yet."

And then the father defined to her also what her rights were under the law; and how these likewise directly affected Jack, bound like herself, and without his knowledge. Nor did he endeavour in the least to conceal anything, nor attempt to gloss the matter over, but set forth how practically Jack's only means of present relief lay through her initiative; explaining how she herself at once, and later either she or Jack, might institute proceedings to vacate the marriage. In conclusion, he told her that if the marriage was not annulled, he had resolved that it should be sanctified by holy church; and further, that such a ceremony, if performed, would serve to clinch the union closer still, and leave their sole remedy by divorce in later years.

"Kate, Kate!" he concluded, "if you were only old enough, only matured enough, to know yourself, and to realise what it all meant to you—and to Jack—to your life's happiness and his!"

No word came from the slender trembling form, her

head on his shoulder and her arms encircling his neck. Her father's last words had given her a new understanding, revealing to her full consciousness the choice before her—that of self, and self-effacement.

"Father," she whispered at last, "I have always loved Jack. I cannot remember the time I didn't. And don't think badly of me, dear,—I think I love him better than anything in the whole wide, wide world. Yes, even better than I do you. But differently,—in some other way. Oh, yes, some other way. I am certain that I shall never feel the same to anybody else. I know I shall never be happy without Jack. How can I ever do any of those awful things the Judge suggested?"

"But we have not quite come to that as yet, and you are not necessarily going to be asked to, dear child."

She threw herself upon a lounge, and burying her face in her arms, burst into a paroxysm of weeping. Her father remained silent, realising that, young as she was, she in a measure grasped the situation, and also comprehended how another's happiness as well as her own was at stake.

Finally her sobbing ceased, and she rose, a grey look on her tear-stained face, but with expression set and determined as she faced her father.

"Does Jack know about this?" she asked more calmly.

"I think so. His mother was to tell him, and must have done so by this time. There, I can see them now, coming along the terrace towards the house."

"Send him here, Father," she said evenly. "I want —please—to see Jack—alone," and the child's face was stamped with a strength and nobility of purpose that belied her age.

When, after a wakeful night, Jack stepped through the long French windows opening into the library, al-

though by no means free of the doubts and perplexities arising from the strange situation in which he found himself, his mind was nevertheless thoroughly made up that there was but one course, and one only for him to follow. He candidly admitted his very deep and sincere feeling for Kate; and although he had never previously given the matter a moment's serious thought, he now realised how much she had become a part of his daily thought and life. Moreover, the only avenue by which —according to his mother's statement—he could disentangle himself from his present relation to Kate, was so repugnant and distasteful to his feelings, that he refused to tolerate its consideration.

On Jack entering the room, Mr. Marston came forward, and after shaking him earnestly by the hand, said that Kate was awaiting him; and then went away, bidding God be with them.

As Jack shut the library door, he turned to face Kate standing before him with white set look, her hand extended against his nearer approach. In few words, her sweet musical voice trembling as she spoke, she told him without reserve or hesitation all that lay in her heart. She neither plead the cause, which, gathering strength in its recital, nearly stilled her heart, nor asked excuse, but told him of her love, the love of child for hero; and as she spoke the seed of man's best thought for woman rooted in his heart, rich and clean in its unsullied manliness.

"Jack," she continued, "I've thought all of this alone, time and again, and I've partly said it to you many times. Why should I not fully repeat it now? You are my husband. Think of it, dear. And I am your wife! Isn't it wonderful? What does it all mean, Jack? Come in here."

She beckoned him within the room leading off the annex, and which was always known as hers, and where, scattered here and there upon the walls and tables, were treasured the chosen relics of her child life; such mementos as we keep and cherish through the years—memorials of past days we love to dwell on, and which never die. One by one she took them up and told of them. And with each and every one, she pointed out how he was part and parcel of the memory. This, he had himself given her; that, they had quarrelled over, and then crying, kissed and made it up. On one table lay an album of pressed flowers, the work of both. Beside it a book of brilliant autumn leaves, gathered on their drives and walks. Opposite stood a rustic stand and basket, the fruit of many industrious hours, when, driven to shelter by the rain, they had stayed indoors and fashioned it of sapling and white birch bark. Photographs of themselves, one taken by the other, with frames by both, were placed about. Sketches of spots they loved to visit on their outing days, hung upon the walls. And then she led him to the window looking towards the southern hills, and there recalled adventurous times in the forest, searching for whatever came, and lunching by its brooks. On, and on she went, reviving memories of joyous days with him, the only playmate that she ever had.

"And you were always so sweet and kind. Of course I always loved you. How could I help loving you? And why not tell you so, now that we are married, Jack? Just this once, for I must prove it to you now, and give you up—and perhaps, some day, you will marry me again?"

"Give you up? Marry you again? I'll never marry you again," he cried, catching her up in his arms and

kissing her, "nor any one else. No, you won't get away, Kiddie, till I am good and ready."

"Jack," she said, when she had broken loose, "You are making it too hard for me. I want you free to do whatever you like, and marry any one you please,—but I love you, Jack."

"But, Kiddie—"

"No, come here beside me, Jack, and look into this glass," she interrupted, leading him towards a long mirror. "What do you see? You see a big, strong man, my knight you know, who is going to fight his way in the world, and make the best of himself and win. And he must not be tied down, at least not now,—not until he is sure of himself, and it is proved to him as necessary to his real happiness. And I am going to conquer myself—also—and—give you up—Jack—and prove, how—much—I love you—and that I am not a—mere—child."

"What else do you see?" she persisted, as he strove to interrupt her, the tears welling from under the dark glasses and rolling down her face, "Nothing but a child,—a—mere—child. And she looks so homely, Jack! Just see how awkward she is; how thin and pale and freckled, too; without hair or eyes! That is no wife for you,—not yet. I know what father and the Judge must think,—but you never shall do it, Jack! We were married without either of us realising it. Perhaps they have been pitying us! Father understands it better now, as far as I'm concerned, for I told him all I felt. Yet he thinks me too young to know my mind, and is worried, I know, about what is fair to you. I'm going to have our marriage all undone. If you want me any time in years to come, you will always find me ready, dear." She paused a moment, adding as she drew herself back with uplifted chin, "Then, I shall never have

any excuse for feeling that my husband married me by accident, and stood by it for honour's sake."

Again Jack caught her to him; nor would he let her go, until with tender speech he had told her how much she really was to him, and before all others, man or woman. And forsooth, this was so much the same affection, alike in quality, if lesser in degree than hers, as to afford no differences to be explained away. So Jack, at last, with endearing soothing words, prevailed upon her to accept things as they stood, if only for his welfare's sake alone; further convincing her that it was but fair and just to him to have her father marry them as well, binding their present marriage close and fast, and free from any slightest doubt.

That afternoon Jack left for New York, returning before his final departure with his mother in time to have his marriage with Kate formally consecrated by her father, and leaving again the same day. Mr. Marston made it a condition precedent to the ceremony, that Jack should not again see or claim his bride till she had passed her seventeenth birthday; and he was so unalterably insistent on this point, that the young couple had perforce to pledge their word to that effect. The others present at the service, which was held in the library, were Judge Eggleston, Mrs. Ingersoll, and Nathan Gibson; and the record was duly sworn to, attested, and filed away. No one besides themselves suspected the strange drama that had come to the Grange. With them it was a closed book; their lips solemnly sealed until the day should come, if ever, when bride and groom might claim their own.

CHAPTER IX

A LETTER

"LOS ANGELES,
"Friday, April 15, 1898.

"*Dear Jack:*

"That you may possibly be coming back to this country, and that I should be so far away! If you come, and I were going to be at home before you left, we might at least telephone to each other, and I should hear your voice again. Your letters are everything to me, and what you say enchanting. No, I shall never tire of them. You need not be in the least afraid of that. The nearest approach to regret at your home-coming will be that your letters must cease. But you will say it all then, won't you? How I shall love to talk with you once more! But I understand that everything is dependent upon whether we have war with Spain; and upon whether your regiment goes to the front, or not. One would think that they could not get along without you! But I suppose you know best; and if you feel it your duty to go, I have not a word to say. Most people whom we have met here do not want war, and do not believe there will be one, anyway. Do you know, I have been dreading this ever since February, when the *Maine* was sunk. If there is war, and you have to go to it, how I should love to join the Red Cross and go too! I have become perfectly strong again, stronger than I ever was, and if I had a chance, would like to be a nurse and help to do my share. And

could not leave father, nowadays, for any cause.
rtainly feels much better than when we came. He
ss pain, and is more cheerful. The worst trouble
heart, and despite all the encouragement offered,
icipate with dread the next few months. As soon
ssible we are going back to the Grange—as I wrote
efore. Think of it—and after so long an absence!
ourney will have to be made by short stages, with
wo nurses and a physician accompanying us the
way. I am told that father is really better; but
he seems still very weak, and to have somewhat lost
rip on things—though always so patient and un-
laining. However, he keeps up his interest in
thing, and is never tired of talking about you.
eager, too, for your letters, and continually im-
s upon me what a fine gentleman I have for a hus-
and how enormously lucky I am in that respect.
lls me that, if anything should happen to him,
romise not to see each other is at once cancelled.
never dare think of losing him. When this dread-
robation is passed, there must not be a shadow of
ud on our meeting. It will make him so happy,
And my birthday will come in the beautiful June,
the very air breathes God, and strength, and love,
ll nature is filled with peace and blessings.
wish that I had Norna—whom I told you about,—
to help us do the trip back. She is so neat, and
and capable. But I do not know where she is, or
to find her. I have written twice to her, and her
r, after a long delay, finally answered herself
econd letter. She wrote that Norna left home a
ago last summer—and immediately after coming
the Grange—to make a visit to some relatives who
near Newcastle; and that the only news she had

had of her since then, was that she had gone off with 'one of your city folks.' Some one who had met her on his return from a fishing trip! She added that this was told her by their priest, who heard it when last at Newcastle, and who promised to find out more and report; but that he had been called to missionary work among the Indians in the northwest, and she was unable to get his address. She also said that no one at Newcastle seemed to know anything about the matter,—not even the people where Norna had been staying. I cannot understand why Norna did this thing. When we are back at the Grange I will get Nat to help me, and if I find her address will write to her at once. Perhaps I may persuade her to come to me, for a while at least. I will let you know if I hear from her, as you will remember I promised you. I wonder what kind of a city man married her! I hope he is nice.

"I love the photographs you sent me; especially the smaller ones. I am sorry to refuse you anything whatever, but of course I have no idea of sending you one of myself. You must have lots of pictures of that quaint looking girl-bride you married so long ago. When we meet, if you don't like the blossoming, I will return to the old cap and the blue glasses, and be your little 'Kiddie' again. You married such a homely piece, Jack, that you cannot possibly be disappointed when you see me. You certainly must have had a lot of faith, and courage too, to act so loyally. Perhaps I may surprise you just a little, yet you must not expect so very much. You never could have married me for my good looks, and I suppose that I ought always to cling to that as a precious fact, and be contented. Any improvement will be pure profit. It could only have been what heart and soul there was in me that you

loved, and as you understand them. You stood by me for better or for worse; because I was I, and no one else. Nevertheless, I should love to become so beautiful in your eyes that you could not bear to take them off of me; therefore I prink my hair, and fight the freckles, and cultivate body and mind for your sake, Jack,—and mine,—which is the same thing. So you should not have my photograph if I had any; or if there were time to have one taken and sent to you. You say you may not know me in long dresses, with hair done up, without any cap, and the fierce goggles gone. Oh, yes you will! You must. You cannot help yourself, if you love me, Jack; not if you tried to. Remember that this will be the way of it when we meet again:

> "'Thou shalt know her when she comes,
> Not by any dint of drums,
> Nor the vantage of her airs;
> Neither by her crown,
> Nor her gown,
> Nor by anything she wears.
> She shall only well known be
> By the holy harmony
> That her coming makes in thee.'"

. . . . . .

"Saturday morning.

"I have been by turns miserable and hopeful all night long. At first, in despair that you might be called away at all; and more especially that, if you were, you would not return until after my birthday in June. Just think of it! I shall then be seventeen years old! Then again I become wild with the thought of seeing you once more. And now this glorious day brings good news from the doctor. He says that, if nothing unforeseen transpires, father may be moved shortly,—possibly in ten days.

That might bring us back before you come, and certainly before you would have to leave for the front.

"Am I happy? What a question! If war is declared, I know father will let me see you, to tell you good-bye. But I shall never reconcile myself to your going. It would kill me if anything should happen to you. And yet I had far rather lose you, and never see you again, than have you cease to care for me. Nor would I for worlds have you back out on the eve of a fight. That would be too horrible.

"No, there is no news from home; and very little of interest, to you, going on at this place. There are a great many people here, gathered from all over the country, as you may imagine; and of every race, and creed, and breeding under the sun. We live here in a cottage belonging to the hotel, and we have it to ourselves. Father never leaves it except in a closed carriage, and the housekeeping and service is all arranged for by the hotel people. So we have no cares or obligations. As I am with father most of the time, I do not see very many people to know them. He sees no one at all, and I am sure he would be much happier at the Grange. Oh, dear, we have been away so very long! Just to think of it—ever since a few weeks after you and I were married!

"Now I have something to tell you. I had a delightful outing the other day. I hated to leave father, but he was so insistent about it that I felt it would work more harm by fretting him, if I stayed behind, than any good I could do by his side. So I accepted an invitation to join an excursion to a neighbouring cattle ranch, said to be one of the earliest and finest in the country. It belongs to a Mr. Rheinlander, who, though a native of California, is apparently a wanderer on the face of

the earth, and has travelled the world over. He was away at the time, visiting some other of his properties, and was not expected back for several weeks to come. Miss Curtis— Ah! Now you begin to take notice!—who is staying at this hotel, told me all about him. He is apparently quite a remarkable character. Every one here seems to know him, or about him, and to have a great liking and regard for him. People tell all sorts of romantic stories about his early struggles and later success; and how he came from the East, a young man with neither money nor prospects; and that he was a prime mover in building up the West, and the leading spirit in no end of adventures and hair-breadth escapes with Indians, and what are here called 'bad men.'—And don't forget, dear, that some day you are going yourself to be a unit and not a cipher in the world.—He is said to be now the wealthiest man west of the Divide, and to have himself made all he has. He is reported to own whole mines and ranches in California!

"And what do you suppose the young lady told me besides? She said that a year since, when travelling with her family abroad, they were joined by this same Mr. Rheinlander; and that later the party met a most attractive Mrs. Ingersoll, who was travelling with her son, 'a nice indolent boy,'—the very words, Jack!—at Perugia. Also that your mother and Mr. Rheinlander proved to be very old acquaintances, who had not met for over thirty years, which brought them all very pleasantly together for several weeks. She said too—I could have jumped right up and hugged her—that you were the best mannered and most thoughtful person she ever knew, perfectly charming, and ideal in your unselfish devotion to your mother. Also, that you were full of the devil! So there! Now please explain! She added,

moreover, that those days would always be recalled by her as amongst the pleasantest and happiest in her life, and wished that she could only be sure of ever seeing you again! Was I thrilled through and through, to hear from you, and of you, in such a way? Oh! I never shall be so proud again! And there, I was obliged to sit still, and twirl my thumbs, and be most politely interested in another's enthusiasm over my own husband! But, like Brer Fox, 'I lay low and said nuffin.' She declared you completely won over the whole party. Was ever a wife so pleased? She also told me that Mr. Rheinlander had been long contemplating a protracted cruise in eastern waters, and that he was going to arrange for it in the near future, and endeavour to have her, together with you and your mother amongst the guests.

"Jack, I think I must join that little trip myself! Or better, we might make one all on our lonesome. Just you and I. Father tells me that we will be very well off some day. But all I crave is you yourself, and in the shortest possible time.

"There is another that sings your praise, and really misses you beside—our old friend Nat. We can never repay him for all he has done for us since you and I parted. He has tried all he could to help father, and has constantly written him cheering letters from the time we left. And the joke of it all is, that, although he has never once directly alluded to the manner of our marriage, he makes it evident, whether consciously or not I cannot say, that he seriously blames himself for having done you and me a great wrong! He has an intangible but convincing way of apologising for his stupidity, as if he had something to repay to us,—an obligation to make good. He has an office now in con-

nection with Judge Eggleston's old firm. His letters show him to be the same kind hearted, loyal friend he ever was; simple, and honest, and true. We heard from him the other day, mostly about business,—for father has put the management of his affairs into Nat's hands —in which he said that Wolfine was 'thinning' for us. Oh, how I hated to leave her! But there was no other way, as it would have been well nigh impossible to bring her along. So I did not encourage the idea when father suggested it. Just think what it will recall to you and me, to take one of our long walks again; and Wolfine, with her noiseless dainty tread, picking her way alongside, or tearing through the woods with that wonderful speed of hers! I miss my birds, too, and the garden, and so many associations connected with you, and the jolly days we had together. Oh, dear, I get so homesick at times!

"The ring you put on my hand that day, though very narrow and thin, is smooth and semi-round, like any wedding ring, and father fretted that it might betray me, or at least cause comment. So we concluded that, as I was going amongst strangers, I had better try and conceal it as far as possible. It shall never again leave the finger on which you placed it. Not if I can help it. Therefore father gave me a curious old ring with a scarabæus stone in it—one he had once picked up abroad and which he says is quite a rare antique—and Nat had a jeweller hollow out a receptacle on the inside so as to exactly envelop my wedding circlet, which is held in place by a concealed spring. It is rather loose for me, but your ring is out of sight, and the most anybody could gossip about, would be that I was an engaged lassie, instead of an old married woman. For I do feel, Jack, as if I had been married so awfully long

ago. I do not think I could stand it, if the time were not drawing nigh when I can count the days, and soon the hours, when I shall see you once more.

I have written a long letter, at the risk of its crossing you coming back. If I said a tithe of what lay in my heart, the reading would delay your coming. So God keep and bless you, dearest.

"Lovingly,

"KATE.

"P.S. Give lots of love to Aunt Emily. Judge Eggleston has an extended vacation arranged for. He sailed for Europe about the middle of May, intending to be absent all summer. I have, curiously enough, not seen him once since you left. After you departed he was very little at Dorset; and when he came to the Grange I invariably missed him."

CHAPTER X

WAR AND PEACE

A WEEK later hostilities broke out between the United States and Spain. Towards the end of May, Kate and her father returned to the Grange, the latter very feeble and greatly exhausted by the trying journey. Ten days later a cablegram was received from Jack announcing that he was coming back, and would take passage on a steamer due in New York on Wednesday, June 15th; and that on his arrival he would have to leave almost at once for Florida to join his regiment at Tampa, where it was awaiting orders. He assured her, however, that nothing should prevent his seeing her before he left for the war—if her father permitted; and, in any event she might depend on his telephoning to her immediately on his arrival in New York.

The same afternoon father and daughter were in the library, their chairs drawn up to the fire. On the hearth lay Wolfine. The shadows deepened as the sun sank below the distant hills, and the hush of eventide fell over the clearings and woodlands without, and the little family circle within. Kate was lost in idle thoughts of the future, and her coming meeting with Jack. Mr. Marston had been talking to her of the past, and recalling reminiscences of her mother, whose likeness in crayon hung before them. He spoke to his daughter of that mother's sweetness, high ideals and strength of mind; of her force of character, and faithful, gentle spirit; and of how she had been taken from him in the

prime of her womanhood. In his own mind he traced too, line by line, the startling resemblance developing between the girl and the radiant beauty of her who gave her birth, and who paid her life in forfeit. He prayed that soul, and face, and form might match that parent's loveliness. He talked also of Jack, and planned how Kate should meet him directly when he came, and bring him to the Grange, and be his wife. And while speaking, in the still and restful quiet of the parting day, he fell asleep. Kate mused on in changing fancies, till Wolfine, gazing at the calm and peaceful face, rose and eyed him closer; then softly wailing, awoke Kate's observation of the still figure whose soul had passed away.

From far and near the folk gathered to pay their last respects to the memory of the Pastor. His Master's work well done, the spirit had returned to God who gave it. But the priceless result of his example, the noble memory of the friend who was gone, left its indelible stamp for wholesome good and sweet endeavour, never to be effaced from the grateful recollection of Dorset.

The last mourner wended his homeward way. The echoing rumble of a distant train, as it wound through the tortuous valley below, signalled the departure of many who had been his parishioners in the years gone by. More than one of these earnestly begged Kate to come to them, at least for a season, and tendered their sympathy and willing assistance. But she was to meet Jack in three days, and could make no plans for the future; though in this she was obliged to keep her own counsel, and therefore excused herself as best she might. Judge Eggleston was abroad, and except for Nat, there was no one throughout the length and breadth of the

land with whom she felt that, by any possibility, it would be best or right to discuss her marriage or plans.

Kate was entirely alone at the Grange, except for the servants in the house and the help attached to the place. Nat, however, proposed to remain in the neighbourhood until she went to New York to meet Jack, the coming Wednesday. He agreed likewise to escort her on the way. Judge Eggleston, they both supposed, was, probably, her father's executor; and it appeared at first, that until he returned from his trip abroad, Kate might be unfortunately placed for sufficient funds to meet her requirements. Yet she called to mind how her father had repeatedly impressed upon her, that in case of any accident to himself, she would find papers affecting her interests and well being in his safe,—concealed behind the book shelves in a corner of the library—the combination of which he had given to her with a duplicate key, and to which she always had access.

Kate was experiencing the bitter and the sweet of life, first one and then the other dominating her thoughts. At times, grief for the father whom she had so very dearly loved, overmastered her, and she felt she would never become reconciled to her loss. Again, as she realised that Jack would so shortly greet her, everything else was momentarily forgotten in the anticipated happiness of seeing him once more. And so passed the two days following the funeral, with busy work and planning, and divided joy and sorrow. The journey to New York was arranged for, as well as the disposition of the household pending her return. She knew nothing specifically about Mr. Marston's affairs. It was sufficient that her father had always assured her that she need never be anxious in that regard, and that she would be amply provided for. Beyond the supplying of her temporary

wants until Judge Eggleston's return, she did not give such matters a passing thought.

An examination of the safe disclosed a box directed to herself. The contents consisted in the main of personal effects, Mrs. Marston's jewels, valued remembrances and keepsakes, with packages of letters. There was also an envelope, superscribed with Kate's name, and containing fifteen hundred dollars in bank notes of different denominations. These had all in due form been made over to her absolutely, and by instruments dated many months before Mr. Marston's death, and were thus independent of any control on the part of his executor.

Nat counselled Kate to take the money with her to New York. This she did, sewing the greater part of the notes in the lining of her dress. The remainder she put in her purse. Nat also communicated with the steamship company, and ascertained that the steamer would certainly dock on the evening of Wednesday, the 15th, and that the first class passengers would be allowed to land at once and have their baggage attended to the following day, if they so desired. Wednesday morning, therefore, Kate, accompanied by Nat and her maid, left Dorset by a very early train for New York, arriving some time before the hour the steamer was expected, and went at once to the hotel where rooms had been reserved. Here, after a hurried dinner, Kate made ready to drive to the docks. After bidding her good-bye, Nat continued to watch the hotel 'bus by which she and her maid departed, until the vehicle was out of sight. He would have greatly preferred to go with her, both that he might also welcome Jack, and likewise be within calling until his two friends had met. But Kate had known all along that this would

be impossible, as it was imperatively necessary for him to be present in court at Augusta, the following morning—and he himself felt secure in leaving her with her maid, as she was an intelligent and most reliable woman and had been with the Marstons for many years.

Thus at last, her heart full with expectation, and every fibre of her being tense with happiness, Kate Marston went out into the world.

CHAPTER XI

DOUBT

NAT GIBSON arrived at Dorset about midnight of Sunday, June 19th. The train was several hours late, so he was obliged to foot it from the station, up hill and down, to his home. His way lay through the open valley and parallel with the Grange, the lines of which, as he passed by, could just be defined against the starlit sky. He stopped for a few minutes, admiring the picturesque outline of the old house, which lay, long and low, dim and solitary upon its commanding position on the high plateau, the only light discernible being the reflected rays of a single lamp burning under the northern porch. He wondered whether Kate and Jack were there, or whether they were still in New York. Perhaps they had come and gone, and he had missed them. For the first time since the marriage ceremony, where he had so unwittingly officiated, he began to feel confident that his careless stupidity had borne good fruit after all. He thought it all over as he resumed his way, plodding wearily along the dusty road, and felt cheered and more contented in regard to what had taken place than he had for many a day; for his heedless act had disturbed and mortified him ever since its occurrence. He would go and see them in the morning, he determined within himself; and felt happy and expectant in the welcome he was certain to receive.

Nat slept late into the following day; and the sun was nearly in its zenith before he started for the Grange. As he neared the house an unaccountable restlessness oppressed him, not to be shaken off. Try as he might, he failed to rid himself of what he knew must be only a sheer morbidness, with no objective and no reason for its existence. He left the beaten road, taking to the open fields; and as he paused for breath at the top of the last incline, the Grange lay before him. At the western end, among the flowers and roses, profuse and brilliant in the terraced garden, he could see old James, his back turned and bending over at his work. James, the head gardener, was a product of the Grange, born upon the premises—no one knew how many years ago. He was unmarried, and lived for the place and on the place, in the hollow behind the house. One would have supposed the old servitor owned it all himself, for he perpetually spoke of each tree and bush and shrub as his. Judging by his loyal heart, his veracity could not be impeached, for what he advised was invariably for the best and therefore done, and neither help nor master bade him nay. How many times, Nat reflected, had he seen him working thus; though now the picture was incomplete, for the figure of a child, a girl, was lacking—the close partner of the old man among their flowers. Kate alone dared ever to gainsay him, and was the only one to whom he condescended to defer. Nat smiled as he passed on, thinking of the fierce disputes between the two, on soil and seed and times for planting, and how Kate always gained her point,—but whether by right of argument or the man's partiality, did not appear.

The windows on the southern side, by which he approached, all opening from master's rooms and from the

library and hall, were shut, and backed by drawn shades. Nat stopped, ill at ease, doubtful what the closed rooms and silence meant. At that moment, the low-couched, grizzled head of Wolfine quickly turned the angle of the western porch, growling inquiring challenge to his coming, as with cocked ears and head raised she sniffed the air. At once she was on him, her pliant body twisting and turning as she gamboled in her glee; describing short, then widening circles; jumping at him and springing back, and thence forward once again. She rubbed herself against his knees, whining and evidencing her welcome as she best knew how to express it. Wolfine and Nat had always been excellent friends; but so far as Nat could recall, a similar access of canine confidence had never been included in their mutual reckoning. He wondered what had brought it about. Such exuberance of welcome, whether towards man or woman, did not fit the marked repose and dignity which usually characterised the dog. That sort of thing was generally reserved for her mistress alone. Neither Jack, nor Mr. Marston even, had commonly received more than mannerly greeting from the great beast—especially when Kate was near. And then it came upon him all at once that Kate was not there, was not at home, and that his moody premonitions had been on her and Jack's account, and that some mischance had happened. He hurried towards the house and up the steps; Wolfine, her first welcome over, lagging by his side with her curved tail carried low, in agreement with the man's mood and her own.

He pounded with the knocker, and a maid servant came to his summons. Her face, as she opened the door, was lighted up with expectancy, to fall again in blank disappointment on perceiving who it was.

"Oh, sir! I thought it would sure be Miss Kate," she said, without stopping to be questioned.

"Has she been here, or sent you any word?" Nat inquired.

"No, sir, though we've been waiting on her coming every day. She's sent us no word, neither, Mr. Gibson. Elise—that's Miss Kate's maid, you know, sir, isn't back neither, and we all feel kind of worried. Wolfine acts so restless she can't bide still a second, and there's no keeping her inside, nor doing much with her."

Nat reflected a moment, before asking anxiously:

"Has no message come from any one at all?—No telegram?" he added, as the servant shook her head.

"There's a telegram come for Mr. Marston as was, sir. I put it on the table in the library, with the mail that's come from the post office. There's lots of mail, Mr. Gibson. Some goes to Mr. Marston, and some to Miss Kate.

"Has any one telephoned since we left?"

"Not a single phone, sir, and we kept the doors open so as to hear her ring."

Nat did not stop to make further inquiry,—but stepped inside and made his way to the library. Here the stillness and the darkness, pregnant with the close and heavy air from freshly gathered flowers whose perfume filled the room, stifled him. Hastily he pulled up the shades and opened the windows, letting in the sweet fresh mountain air. Except for a litter of mail upon the centre table, the room appeared to Nat to all intents and purposes exactly as he had left it five days since, when, in the early morning he had called for Kate, to escort her to New York. One thing, however, disturbed him as he glanced about. He was surprised to find the receiver of the telephone, which stood near the hall door, hang-

ing down and disconnected from its rest. Small cause for wonder, he thought, that no call had been heard! He went to the table and began to examine the mail, laying aside therefrom two letters and a telegram. One of the former was addressed to Mr. Marston, and the other to his daughter, and both bore foreign postage. He recognised that they were directed in Jack's handwriting, and he gathered from the date of the stamping that both were written and posted early in June, or before Jack sailed. He picked up the telegram, directed to Kate—but the superscription told him nothing. He hesitated for some seconds, twisting the yellow envelope to and fro in his hands; doubtful as to what course he had better pursue, and whether he was justified in opening it or not. Finally he put it back, and going to the telephone, asked for "New York" and the hotel where he and Kate had dined, and where rooms had been reserved for herself and maid. The operator took his directions, but before leaving notified him that there had been two calls for the Grange, from a Mr. Ingersoll, on Saturday; both late in the afternoon, and both from Boston. Moreover, that Mr. Marston was inquired for each time, and that the caller was instructed on the second occasion, as a result of information from the operator at the Dorset office, that Mr. Marston had died. Further, that yesterday, Sunday, there had also been several calls from New York, all from the same party,—this time inquiring for Miss Marston. This had all been reported at the time to the main office, as the registration would show. It was also on record that Mr. Ingersoll was told the last time he rang up, that the number asked for must be out of order, inasmuch as the office was unable to connect.

Nat paced up and down the room, anxious and

troubled, alternately listening for a summons to the instrument, and, with wavering impulse eyeing the telegram as it lay before him on the table. At last the call came, and he got quickly into communication with the desk at the hotel. In reply to his questions, he was assured that the rooms had not been given up, but that neither the lady nor her maid had been seen nor heard of at the hotel—at least so far as any one could remember—since the day they had registered; nor had either room been slept in, nor the baggage been removed.

Nat then rang up the office of the steamship company, in control of the vessel on which Jack was supposed to have taken passage, and asked if Mr. John Ingersoll's name was on the passenger list. To this he received an affirmative reply. Hesitating no longer, he at once rushed to where he had left the telegram and tore it open. The message was a notification from a hospital in New York, advising Miss Marston that a woman claiming to be her maid had met with a severe accident while waiting for her at the wharves, and would not be able to leave the institution for several weeks.

"Then Kate is alone,—unless with Jack,—but where?" Nat exclaimed. "Not at her hotel—whether with him or not. And without her baggage! But if Jack is with her, why should he be telephoning to her at Dorset—unless they had separated to meet again here? And what was Jack doing at this time between New York and Boston? Perhaps he may have left Kate to go South to join his regiment. Yet that does not explain either her whereabouts or Jack's presence in Boston."

He found it impossible to reconcile such facts as he had, or adapt the circumstances to even a plausible assurance of Kate's safety.

"And here I am," he muttered, "doing nothing, like a

helpless lout, unable to stir hand or foot; with Kate at least astray, perhaps injured, killed; God knows when, or where, or how!"

He looked at his watch, to find that the train due about noon from the south should be just about arriving, although it could generally be depended on to be anywhere from five minutes to five hours behind the scheduled time. He knew, however, that the morning mail came on that train, which might possibly bring news from Kate or Jack. Something else might develop in the meantime; but saving that, he resolved to take the late afternoon train to Portland, from which place he could reach New York early the following morning. And that, he reflected, would be Tuesday, nearly six days since he left Kate, or, as far as he was able to learn, any one had knowledge of her whereabouts. If Kate did not come to the Grange or send any message there before the time of his leaving, then the quicker he found himself in New York the better.

"It is inconceivable," he meditated, "what Jack can be monkeying about—first in one place and then in the other. It is disquietingly evident, too, that up to yesterday afternoon Kate had not been with Jack—else why should he have been telephoning her here? Jack arrived on Wednesday, unless something happened to him on the voyage. His name was on the list of passengers. It is most improbable that the company could have made an error in that respect, and equally unlikely that there was any one else answering to the same name."

Nat had seen in the newspaper, that the steamer docked about nine P. M. on Wednesday. If Kate and Jack did not meet at that time, why had the former not returned to the hotel, or the latter made some effort to communicate with her at the Grange before Saturday?

Jack, apparently, had called up the father in the first instance, and then, on learning of the latter's decease, had telephoned the daughter—but not until late the following afternoon. His thoughts ran on with question and reply, and counter question. He could offer no solution at all satisfactory to his mind. He always came back to the query, why had Kate not returned to her rooms, or at least sent for her belongings? When she left the hotel for the wharf she had with her only the clothes on her back, and to the best of his recollection had taken neither coat nor umbrella. She might therefore have been subjected to the discomforts of the worst thunderstorm of the season. Suddenly he jumped up excitedly, and more specifically questioned the steamship company by telephone, to learn that the Mr. Ingersoll whose name was enrolled among the first-class passengers, had, it was true, reserved a stateroom and paid for the same—which accounted for his name being on the printed list as already reported—but at the very last moment had forfeited his passage, wiring that he was unavoidably detained, and unable to sail.

Thus it became apparent that Jack, having arrived, must have taken a later steamer than the one on which he had first determined—which last was due in New York on Wednesday, the 15th instant—and had probably sailed for Boston instead of New York, reaching the former city on Saturday, the 18th. That would account for the Saturday messages, unquestionably sent before Jack started for New York, whence on his arrival Sunday morning he had again telephoned to the Grange, and once more to no purpose. What he had since done, or what had become of him, was only conjecture. Another point that added to Nat's anxiety was, that so far as he knew, there was no reason why Jack, not aware of the

Parson's death, should have expected Kate to meet him at all. On the contrary he would have naturally supposed her to be attendant on her invalid father at the Grange. He was puzzled, also, if this conclusion was correct, why Jack had not cabled his change of steamer.

"Then what can possibly have become of Kate?" he exclaimed aloud. "She had with her neither escort nor maid. Indeed she must have been on the wharf from an hour before sunset until certainly after nine o'clock, and perhaps later still, without any one whom she knew to appeal to or protect her."

Wrought upon by his forebodings, and aghast at the dire possibilities of evil happenings to Kate, Nat determined to go to New York. From time to time as he sat at the library table he put down his hand to stroke Wolfine, who kept close by his side, her head resting on her outstretched paws. He felt that a reciprocal understanding existed between him and the dog, whose intelligence he believed must have scented trouble, and whose restlessness at Kate's absence he easily appreciated. Who, of the household, he thought to himself, would miss Kate more? Who loved her more than Wolfine? The dog showed by every action a great uneasiness. She would go to the window and scent the air, then wander into Kate's sanctum off the library, then prowl about the room; ending by thumping down on the floor close to Nat, and then in a few minutes rising only to repeat the circuit over again. Occasionally, on attracting Nat's special notice, she would rise and wag her tail, half reluctantly; or whining, shove her head into her companion's lap, gazing into his face with inquiring, beseeching look, that asked as plainly as words might say:

"Where is she, and why doesn't she come? She has been away so long."

When Nat had finished his lunch, in order to meet any emergency which might arise he sat down and wrote out a clear and succinct account of the circumstances—as he understood them—supplementing these facts with his own conclusions. This he enclosed in an envelope directed to both Kate and Jack. He then lighted a cigar and gave himself up to a careful recapitulation of the whole matter, at the end of which he rose.

"Yes," he said out loud, "I could have perhaps arranged better, but it is no use imagining or arguing what might have been done. The only thing now is to hunt for Kate, and trace her from the time she left the hotel."

Wolfine, hearing the mention of her mistress' name, sprang up and towards the door, where she halted with eager look turned towards Nat. Then as the latter shook his head, she slouched to the open casement and, throwing up her head, wailed a woful melancholy plaint; her lament like the voice of her kind in the still midnight hour when alone and deserted, and when the moon is full and bright.

Nat rang for the maid servant, and informed her that he would be back within an hour. At the same time he gave her the memorandum with instructions that it should be delivered to Kate or Jack immediately on the arrival of either. Then, picking up his hat, and calling to Wolfine, he made his way home and across the fields.

On his return, the dog trotted along by his side, picking her way with her usual fastidious tread, till they came to the gravelled carriage turn in front of the entrance door. There she became suddenly restless, running to and fro in front of the porch, her nose low, and catching the air sharply through her twitching nostrils with rapidly increasing excitement, till, tossing up her head, she gave one glad bark of surprised delight, and

threw herself unavailingly upon the close shut door, time and again. Then, paying no heed whatever to Nat, or waiting for him to give her access to the house, she jumped over the intervening railing on her left and in a couple of bounds reached the open library window, where, backing off, she swiftly launched herself through the casement and disappeared within.

Nat, hastening up the steps, turned the handle of the door with nervous trembling fingers, and finding it unlocked, hurried across the threshold. Right well he knew from Wolfine's actions that either Kate or Jack must be within. With a gasp of immense relief he rushed along the hall to the library, and raising the portières, stepped into the room.

Jack indeed was there; but as Nat took in the picture before him, he felt at once, and beyond the peradventure of a doubt, that his friend brought evil tidings.

Without, the lovely June lay calm and restful beneath the blue sky. The fresh verdure of plain and woodland slopes; the exhalation of a wealth of flowers and blossoms; the mating songs of happy birds and the thrum of insect life wafted on the gentle breeze, bore Nature's testimony of joy and peace. Within, this room—which had been peculiarly the abode of love and happiness, and which was filled with gentle memories of Kate and her father—was now the witness of anxiety and despair. Jack was seated by the table where Wolfine came so suddenly upon him, and was not at first aware of Nat's presence, his whole attention being taken up with the dog. In one hand Jack held the memorandum, which he had been pondering over when interrupted by Wolfine. Presently, as Nat stood silently looking on, the dog jerked herself back and free, and looking into Jack's

face, asked as best she could by eyes and canine speech, for Kate. At this Nat came forward, and each echoing the other's words as their eyes met, cried:

"Where can she be?"

"God alone knows what has become of her,—what may have happened to her!" was Jack's reply.

"Do you know anything further than what I wrote down?" asked Nat.

"Nothing whatever. I have had no word from her since a very short letter I received, written from Los Angeles and dated May 20th. I cabled her that I was coming back on June 9th, and would be due on the 15th. I engaged my state-room for that date, but was unable to meet the vessel. My mother accompanied me to Liverpool to see me off, but was taken the night before the ship sailed with such a severe attack of illness that I had to forfeit my passage. Happily, her indisposition proved to be only temporary, and was pronounced in no wise serious. Therefore I was able, as you surmised, to leave the following morning—by the *Cephalonia*—and arrived at Boston on Saturday, instead of New York on the previous Wednesday as I had at first expected."

"Did you cable to the Grange the change of steamer?"

"No; and there it seems I made a fatal mistake. I was not able to decide until the very last moment, and then I was driven pretty hard to secure a berth and get aboard. I can never forgive myself. As soon as I was off the vessel, I tried to telephone to Mr. Marston and again before taking the five o'clock for New York, but without success. As you know, I was under solemn obligations not speak to Kate, and wanted permission to telephone. When I arrived in New York, I heard for the first time of Mr. Marston's death, and at once telephoned to the Grange, and this time for Kate,—as I then

had a right to do—but was told the connection was out of order. I next tried to get hold of you, but without success. So I started at once for Dorset. God, what am I to do?" he cried, raising his face, drawn and haggard with anxiety.

"We can do everything," Nat answered, "only we are helpless as long as we remain here, or until we can get to New York. Find her we must—and will."

"That's all right, old man, but the possibilities of finding her are—"

"In the Almighty's hand, only," Nat broke in. "But it is up to us to do our very utmost. It seems impossible for us not to succeed. To accomplish that, for Kate's sake Jack you must strain every nerve and pull yourself together. Now, you are utterly unstrung. We should leave here for the station in less than a quarter of an hour. Stay where you are for a few minutes till I return. I will leave what further instructions are necessary with the household." And without waiting for any reply he hastened from the room.

By the time Nat returned to the library, Jack had outwardly composed himself; though his pale, careworn face and troubled eyes, indexed the disquietude and misgivings that tormented him.

As they drove to the station Nat jumped out at the postoffice and entered the building. It seemed to his companion an interminable time before he reappeared; and, a distant signal warning him, he was about to seek and fetch his friend, when Nat came hurrying out and took his place beside him, uttering no comment nor giving any excuse for the delay. The excitement of making the train, now coming to a standstill at the station, prevented all conversation between the two. It also gave Nat sufficient time to somewhat steel his face and voice,

and outwardly to recover from the blow that he had just received, the suddenness of which completely stunned him.

He had received two letters in answer to his inquiry for mail. The first that he opened was from his office, enclosing a copy of a telegram to himself from Judge Eggleston. This informed him that the latter expected to be back within a week, and that Nat was to act as his attorney, so far as was necessary and possible, in the matter of the Marston estate. The second was a registered letter. This he did not at first more than glance at, being called upon to sign for it, and supposing it to be one that he had been expecting in relation to a lawsuit he had argued the previous Saturday. It could be just as well attended to when he was on the cars, he thought; and was about to put it in his pocket, when his eye caught the superscription. It was in a woman's handwriting. With a joyful cry he tore it open—to read.

June 17th, 1898.

"*Dear Nat:*

"I am going away,—as far away as I can,—and shall never come back. I do not want to be sought after, and you must not attempt it. It will only make a scandal, and do no good nor alter my purpose. I want to be to every one I have known just the same as if I were dead. Otherwise, I shall be more unhappy than it is possible for you to realise. Will you and Judge Eggleston remember this, and give such excuses to other people as you think fit. If I am ever in want, I promise to let one of you know. At present I have most of what you will remember I took with me. It is more than I hope to need.

"I give you no reasons for what I am doing—but it is

my own act. My marriage was a terribly cruel farce, and my most earnest prayer is that I shall never see his face again. I am keeping the promise I made him. He will understand.

"Take care of Wolfine—for my sake—and forget—

"KATE MARSTON."

CHAPTER XII

THE SPIDER

THE heat had been most oppressive for an early June day. From morn till eve, the sun had poured down upon the crowded streets. No breath of stirring current gave the slightest life to the deadness of the air, or relieved the moody and exhausting temper of the atmosphere. The still, humid sultriness mellowed in the slowly gathering clouds, which, low and threatening, thickened on the horizon—heralds of the approaching storm. As the daylight waned, the human spiders of the night crept from their holes, and from end to end of the countless thoroughfares began to spin their webs.

Outside the gates that gave entrance to the docks of the great steamship company, a young girl was pacing up and down. Her slim figure dressed in deepest mourning, and her face partially veiled, there was nothing in the uncertain light to distinguish her quality from that of other passers-by. The crush of men and women, of cabs and trains, of street venders and harpies—which had lately thronged the place in anticipation of the incoming liner—had gradually dispersed. The vessel had long since discharged her living freight, and the girl had watched, and noted with eager expectancy, each passenger that crossed the gangway. The last, as she was officially informed, had finally left the ship, and he whom

she sought was not among them. Not until the wharf was cleared did she give up the quest, and then only after she had managed, with infinite difficulty, to see the purser of the vessel and receive his positive assurance that no one answering to the name she inquired for had been a passenger on the trip. In despair she returned to where she had left her maid, but could nowhere discover her. Thus, well on towards midnight, she found herself stranded on the rapidly emptying thoroughfare that paralleled the water front. The excitement of hope, and the confident assurance of a great happiness, had buoyed up her strength and courage through a long hot day of fatiguing travel and insufficient nourishment, till at last, the consequent weariness and mental reaction were beginning to assert themselves. She was positive that she could have made no error as to the name of the steamer, and her tired brain added forebodings and anxious fears for another's safety, to the terrible disappointment which overwhelmed her. With bitter sorrow and depression weighing on her heart, and prostrated by increasing bodily and mental exhaustion, she began to take thought of the lateness of the hour, of where she was, and of how she might best get away. At the time of leaving her hotel, the latter end of the afternoon, her thoughts were engrossed with pictured hopes. She had taken, accompanied by her maid, the hotel 'bus to the wharf—as she was advised to do—inasmuch as it was about to make the regular trip, and obviated their being entirely alone. In regard to her return she had entertained no definite plans, beyond a vague idea that there was the same means of transportation back. All that sort of responsibility, of course,—if she really considered it,—would be another's. Now, all that she desired was to get back to her rooms as quickly as possible, and there

lose her heartache and fatigue in sleep. With a forlorn sigh, she began to look about her, seeking to find some one of whom she might make inquiry as to her better course.

The streets in the meantime had become nearly deserted. Here and there, foot passengers, singly or in groups, passed along on one side or the other of the highway. Now and then rough longshoremen and sailors, noisy and hilarious from their cups, sauntered idly by. Women came along—many young and coarse, their faces piteous, with blatant tongue and leering eyes,—scum long in the spider's web. Occasionally a belated express dashed swiftly on, the clattering strokes of the horses' hoofs, contrasting with the steady jostle from some heavy dray as it pounded over the cobbled pavement. Further on and opposite, the lighting of a rum shop partially illuminated the pavement, disclosing by its rays the stout expansive figure of an officer of the law, stationed thereabouts to do his duty as best he could, and fight the spider when he might,—yet with discretion, and depending solely on the orders of his chief.

A well grown boy came through the dock's enclosure, a despatch in his hand, slamming the gates behind him. Nudging the weary girl, he cried as he hurried on:

"Cut, sis! To cover, or you'll get a ducking."

Shivering, she drew back, repelled and indignant.

His words first called her attention to the gathering clouds, which gradually dropping lower and lower in the sky, had for sometime been hovering like a threatening pall, accentuating the close oppressive heat which enveloped her. Shortly, a swiftly-coming, chilly breeze stirred the heavy air, and a distant rumble of thunder foretold the advancing storm, sweeping from the east. A band of roystering sailors approaching by the water

side, she ran across the street towards the guardian of the peace, and began to question him—only to be rebuffed.

"None of your games with me," he said. "Get along about your business. Go elsewhere, if you like, but not on this beat, and to my face! Come! March! or I'll take you where your like belong!"

Terrified, she shrank away into the night, and pursued her way—unsteadily and unmindful whither. First running, and then walking, bewildered and in despair, she hastened on, keeping as much as possible within the glare of the scattered electric lights. Soon she became dully conscious of footsteps following behind and keeping time with hers—yes, gaining on her. At this she increased her pace, but not her distance; till finally overtaken, she stopped still and abruptly turned about, to face a specimen of that meanest manhood, the lowest of the spider's tribe, a devil's broker—one who plies his vicious calling not for his own but for another's profit, and for the pay it brings. When a gallant air and smart address failed in its effect, he began in different and more familiar strain, and put an arm about her, walking by her side. She, tearing herself from him again and again, strove to escape his presence, but could not shake him off. Finally, as she turned abruptly from a cul-de-sac that emptied off the street, and where a short distance beyond and fronting a gin shop, blared the blaze of an incandescent light, he dropped behind, laughing to himself.

Suddenly the vaults of heaven opened, and directly, the first splashes made by heavy drops of rain gave place to sheets of water pouring from the surcharged clouds, which drenched her through and through. Her hat was quickly shapeless, and her thin black dress a limp pulp, moulding to her figure and staining her face and neck.

Sick, faint, tottering in body and mind; exhausted, terrified and undone, she staggered—reeling within the partial shelter of a dimly lighted porch.

From a short distance, others of the noxious spawn, hidden by the murky darkness had watched and trailed the game, waiting till the victim should be driven to the web. Once more the man approached, solicitous as before. Threats also, he added; and then coarse blasphemies, while she quailed and shrank in desperate fear and loathing. At last, like the final struggle of the helpless fly as it feels the meshes tighten, screaming she blindly struck at him, supplicating God's mercy in her abandonment. And then the man laughed in derision, and whistled loudly, mocking her suppliant cry. At once, and as though in answer to her frenzied prayer, the rattle of a fast approaching vehicle drove him away the second time, laughing still; and she cried with all her exhausted strength for help, as a horse and cab came to a stop beside the curb.

The door was thrown hastily open, and while the driver, dropping his reins, leapt from the box, a woman jumped out. As she came forward the girl, who had sunk down but half conscious upon the sidewalk, dimly recognised her as the same person who had helped her find the purser when she sought him on the wharf. The woman was somewhat overdressed, but her voice smooth and kindly, though her speech hinted of a different school than the other had ever known. Her personality also was intuitively antagonistic, and under other circumstances the girl would have been loath to meet or remember her. Kate now clung to her as a child might to a carnivorous beast that pulls it from the flood. The woman, handling her victim with every tenderness, asked her of herself, and where she lived, and from whence she

came; offering to see her safely back to friends and shelter. She soothed her with kind and cheering words and deft attentions, covering the girl's shoulder with her own thin wrap, and winning her confidence. She assisted her into the carriage, and then poured from a flask and gave the girl to drink, while the other, hovering in the shadows, smiled evilly.

The web had caught its prey.

CHAPTER XIII

A DIGRESSION

ON the Division Registry of a little hamlet on the banks of one of the tributaries of the Miramichi was, and remains, recorded, under date of August 4, 1896, an entry duly attesting the marriage of John Grafton Ingersoll of the State and city of New York, in the United States of America—to Norna Boudré of the county of Gloucester, and town of Bathurst, in the Province of New Brunswick.

When Richard Craig came down the river, his fishing privilege expired, and his annual sport over for the season, his mind would have forecasted almost any strange happening rather than what fate had planned for him. The moral sense, seldom, if ever, disturbed him. He lived solely for himself, and the satisfying of his impulses and passions. Therefore, his very worst enemy would have scoffed at the idea that he would become seriously entangled with the first woman he met after his guides had beached their canoes at the end of that warm afternoon in August. Five days later he was on his way back to the States, accompanied by Norna Boudré in the rôle of his lawfully married wife.

Camp was made on the edge of a narrow belt of woods that fringed the stream, at a spot much used by those returning sportsmen who preferred to prolong their out-of-door life to the last moment, rather than undergo the always questionable comforts of a provincial hotel. Nearby, a narrow path led from the grove where the

tents were pitched sharply upwards to the higher level of the cleared land, on the crest of which stood a large, and for those parts, somewhat pretentious farm house.

As Craig stood by the fire watching the preparations for his last supper in camp, the sight of the coffee pot, together with the clang of a distant cowbell and the cries of children as they drove the cattle home, suggested the luxury of fresh milk,—and he decided to go up to the farm and fetch some back. A short distance from the house a small brook meandered through a thicket of high alders, converging at one point directly to the path by which he was ascending. As he neared the spot, a bell-cow broke from the cover above followed by her companions. And then, swiftly and lightly, the figure of a woman sprang from the densely foliaged bushes across the brook, and stood directly in his path.

Craig had seen and known many fair and attractive women; but never before had he met one who at once impressed her personality upon him to a like degree, and the mere sight of whom raised within him such instantaneous craving for possession. Large-framed, of splendid physique, tall and erect, with coal black hair, her heavy brows and long lashes set off the deep-set brown eyes and smooth dark skin of a face whose gypsy beauty was as rare as it was picturesque; while her expression, haughty and somewhat defiant in repose, was relieved by the flash of large strong teeth whenever her full lips opened to speak or laugh.

Norna Boudré, at this time about twenty years of age, was the only daughter of Pierre Boudré, commonly known as Pete Boudré, and lived with her parents in a small farming settlement on one of the several rivers that empty into Bathurst Harbor. Her father, by inheritance and bringing up, was a woodsman and trapper from the

time he had been able to handle an axe, or use a paddle and tote a pack. His grandfather, Pierre Laussat Boudré, had in his earlier days been one of the leading minor spirits of the "Nor'westers," pioneers of those vast areas lying north and west of the St. Lawrence, and watered by the Fraser, the Columbia and the Saskatchewan. On one of his expeditions far to the westward in the interest of the company, he fell captive to a marauding band of Assiniboine Sioux, and purchased his own life by joining his captors' tribe, clinching the bargain by marrying its most attractive squaw.

The inborn fondness for the nomad's life burned in the veins of his grandson the younger Boudré, the father of Norna, who still followed in the line of the family traditions, although the rewards were now less and the calling had lost the old prestige. It was during a fortnight's delay at Bathurst, attendant on securing a passage to the fur market at Quebec, that he met and courted Norna's mother. She was the elder of the two, of pure English descent, and not so well favoured as the young hunter; but the discrepancy in years was met by a social standing and education in which she had greatly the advantage. Pierre's good looks, and reputation for steady and industrious habits, won the young Englishwoman's consent to be his wife. It turned out to be a happy marriage; and notwithstanding Pierre's yearly wintering in the woods, she had her consolation during the long months in the care and education of her daughter. The mother never spoke French or its Canadian patois if she could possibly avoid doing so, using the English tongue even with her husband. To him any language or polyglot was equally convenient, so long as he could make his words interpret his few desires; for Pierre's conversation had been drilled in consonance with the training of

countless days and nights passed in his own company, and in the silence of the wilds. As a consequence, Norna grew up with a very fair knowledge of the garbled French which she heard on all sides, but without any trace of foreign accent in her simple English speech. Physically, she inherited the picturesque beauty of her father, and from her mother a decided claim to refinement. From both came a natural reticent pride and sense of self-respect, together with an honest, straightforward character.

For Craig to be carried away by a desire to acquire anything, was a long stride towards its attainment. Beginning from the first step of their walk up to the house, in his quest for provender, to the day he was forced to bind his protestations in the presence of a priest, he had but one end in view, and took no thought as to whether such contract bound him legally or not. As to Norna, herself, the boldness of her spirit brooked no calculation as to the outcome. She knew that what she meditated would meet with no objection from either her father or mother, for both must admit that she had done exceedingly well for herself from a social point of view, although such inducement had not in the least directly influenced her own decision. She gave in to Craig, however, on the disputed point of whether she would first notify her parents of what she proposed doing, agreeing to postpone such action until after the ceremony.

So on the 4th of August, in the year 1896, Richard Eliot Craig and Norna Boudré stood before the priest in the modest rectory of a village church. At the beginning of their acquaintance, Craig had given Norna the first name, not his own, which came uppermost in his mind, and without weighing the possible consequences. It was, therefore, without the slightest personal malice, that he

had called himself John Ingersoll. Not until he was asked by the priest to write his name, did the predicament in which he had placed himself dawn upon him. To have then offered any other name than the one already given to Norna as his own, would, unquestionably, have been fatal to the carrying out of the ceremony. He was well aware that Norna was not of the kind to be thus trifled with—at least at this stage. It was no time to hesitate, and in a very few minutes, "John Ingersoll," and Norna Boudré were pronounced man and wife, the marriage recorded, their signatures inscribed in the registry of the parish, and a certificate of marriage, duly attested, given to the bride.

CHAPTER XIV

AN OLD STORY

IMMEDIATELY after their marriage, Craig brought Norna to a small town in the suburbs of New York. Here they established themselves in one of the many apartment houses so common to the environments of our greater cities, and where, except by the remotest accident, the genuineness of his assumed name was not likely to be called in question.

The effect of transplanting a foreign plant into a strange soil and different atmosphere, must always be more or less problematical. The real trouble, and the one most likely to come up, lay, as Craig readily foresaw, in Norna herself. It was more than questionable how far she, a simple, but intelligent country girl, of honest character and good antecedents, yet at the same time utterly ignorant of the world, could or would adapt herself to the life which he offered her, and to the companionships among which she was likely to be thrown during their visits to the city. For how long would the gilded exterior conceal the rottenness which lay beneath; and when the latter was laid bare would acquiescence or open rebellion follow? Naturally there must come a final ending of their relations—but at his initiative. It was merely a question of time, before he would cast the woman he had betrayed upon the tide of deserted and degraded humanity, to become some one else's plaything, or be tossed about with the other wreckage of abandoned and lost hopes in whatever direction fate might decree.

Craig's strong individuality, combined with great forcefulness, was wholly arbitrary, dictatorial and without moral principle. The latter, on the contrary, Norna markedly possessed, though in her simple home life her character had never been sufficiently challenged for its full development, or tested for its strength. Her elopement never occurred to her as wrong in any respect. A good daughter she had always been; loyal to her mother, and a true comrade to her father. Often had she been for weeks at a time in the forests with Pierre; and with such experiences had come self-reliance, hard, shapely and well-developed muscular limbs, with great endurance, a love for the wild and freedom from restraint.

Norna's feeling for Craig was, in its incipiency, the glamour that came in response to this new suitor from an unknown social world, and the dazzling infection of his flattery and address. The man completely absorbed her, and the vehemence of his passion befogged that sagacity and clear intelligence which she rightfully possessed. This made her from the first as ready a prey to his evil machinations as if she had been less honest and clear-sighted, though not so dependable a victim as the more fragile and unfortunate creatures, whom such men as Craig usually pursue and cozen to their final ruin.

The change of climate and environment, the tempting cuisine, the ready money lavishly given for fine apparel and amusements,—was to Norna all fascinating, strange, and mystifying. Occasionally, and for a day or two at a time, Craig would bring her to New York and introduce her to the more substantial haunts of Mammon, and to the garish blaze of the Great White Way with its seductive pleasure-seeking worship. These excursions thrilled Norna with awe and delight. Thrown suddenly into the swiftly moving stream, she played in its shal-

lower waters, dazzled for a time by its meretricious brilliancy and its superficial splendour, her honester womanhood blind to the current's trend, and to its quicksands. Consequently, at first, she missed nothing from the fulness of her happiness, accepting everything as it came to her, and enthralled by the tawdry life. For awhile she allowed herself to drift along, in subjection to the man who possessed her.

And so the days passed, until, in the springtime of the new year, Norna found that a more regular life was demanded of her, with earlier hours and less excitement. And it was at this period that the proof became clear in her mind, that the man to whom she had delivered herself soul and body, was not only becoming tired of her but had been faithless as well. Then Norna's feeling of irreparable loss and injured pride changed to anger and the gall of bitterness. She would gladly have left him then and there, and braved the mortification of returning to her old home like a cast-off garment, slightly worn and rejected by its owner. But her more engrossing thought by day, and through many a sleepless night, was consecrated with intense longing upon her coming maternity. Her unhappiness and anger were often forgotten, and always softened, in contemplative fancy and visionary schemes concerning the welfare of a child to be born—her child. The fear that by deserting the father, she might in some way militate against that child's interests, alone determined her to remain where she was.

CHAPTER XV

DISILLUSION COMPLETE

THE child, so anxiously awaited, came, but any hope that it might better her relations with Craig was doomed to disappointment. In fact he greeted the arrival with open disappointment and disgust.

Nor was this the worst. He plainly resented her absorption in the infant, and suddenly taking advantage of an attack of illness, he had the baby carried off to a "Home" of which he refused to give Norna even the address. Soon he announced that business called him to Europe and went, leaving her in the City, alone and filled with a desperate sick longing for her child. At last she received word that he was homeward bound, and on the evening of his arrival, June 15th, she met him in New York.

They had dined at a showy restaurant and it was still early in the evening when they entered an open carriage and were driven to a large, brilliantly illuminated house, part hotel, part resort. Norna felt a shiver pass over her as she stepped within its doors.

Her whole womanhood was resolved now to demand her child. The scene that followed was painful and completed her disillusionment. Nevertheless she subdued her pride to her mother love, and throwing herself before him clasped his knees in a pitiful appeal.

Throughout, Craig sat apparently unmoved and totally indifferent to her sufferings. When she concluded, an

ironical sneer curled his lips as he broke away from her embrace, and rising, touched an electric bell beside the door.

"Get up. Get up, I say," he told her harshly—his face darkening. "You have said all this before. Full of pathos! Mother and child, and all that! But it's no use, as you might have known. How many times do you expect me to listen to your squealings? I've told you what I meant to do, or rather what I wouldn't do; or better still, what I proposed that you should do. And that, mind you, is just what is going to happen; despite tears, and howls, and your making these exhibitions of yourself. As to your leaving me,—well, we'll discuss that later,—perhaps."

Before Norna had time to reply, a knock at the door interrupted, and a servant entered.

"Get me a whiskey and soda—Scotch—will you? What shall I order you?" he asked, turning to Norna. "What, nothing? Better. Possibly you'll need it," he added maliciously. "Just as you please, then."

"Hold on here," he directed sharply, turning to the servant who was disappearing through the door. "You had better take the lady's gown,—and see that it is well brushed."

As he spoke he went towards the adjoining room, where Norna had previously discarded her dress for a light wrapper, and bringing it back with him handed it over to the servant, remarking;

"Say from me that we will ring for this, when wanted." He then helped himself liberally from the decanter, while Norna continued standing by the opened windows, her back to the light within, in order that she might the better conceal her tear-stained, swollen face and inhale the slight breeze which was beginning to re-

lieve the hot night. She started on hearing Craig address her.

"I am going out," he said, "and will return by and by. Take my advice and don't make a fool of yourself. Things might be worse yet!" And without any hurry he left the room, locking the door from without.

She heard him go, but remained where she was, looking down upon the nearly deserted thoroughfare below.

Occasionally a cab, and here and there a belated foot passenger, might be seen scurrying along the narrow sparsely lighted street. Norna well knew that she was entrapped in a snare, baited, alas, by her own ignorance and foolishness. It came to her for the first time, that any further humiliation on her part would not enhance the child's well-being, although she realised that however much her position mortified, angered and embittered her, she must so govern herself as best to play out the game, wile for wile. The child was the stake. She must lose no point. It was her last remaining hope. Mechanically, she began to finger the never absent string of beads which hung beneath her robe, and to pray for help and patience. While her thoughts were thus engaged, a sharper gust of wind drove the increasing rain through the open casements into the room, and closing the sashes, she stepped back and passed into the adjoining chamber.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SHAME OF A CITY

THE apartment consisted in the main of two rooms, running the entire depth of one wing of the building, and overlooking an alley from the bedroom in the rear. Between this chamber and the opposite wing, a narrow court-yard intervened, so that from the side window Norna was able to see the interior of a large dance and dining hall on the first floor of the opposite extension, and also into the living rooms on a level and above—the distance not exceeding a few yards from wall to wall.

And then, for the first time, she awoke to a full realisation of where she was. The distant, broken sounds of merrymaking, which from time to time reached her while she remained at the front of the house, had carried with them no special suggestion. But the scenes of revelry she now looked upon, with her husband in the midst, and which were clearly within her vision from the darkened room where she stood, filled her with repulsion and dismay. And seeing, a shuddering faintness gripped her, and she shrank back, jerking down the shade to shut out the picture.

An hour passed. Then Norna's attention, as she sat by the window at the rear of her chamber striving to collect her thoughts and to formulate in her mind how she might address her husband on his return, was diverted by the rattle of a fast approaching carriage. It came to a halt directly beneath. It had scarcely stopped,

when a man seated beside the driver jumped down and hurried towards the door of the vehicle, and a middle-aged woman stepped out backwards, supporting the head and shoulders, and followed by a man carrying the body, of a young girl. The seemingly lifeless figure was left to the care of the two men, while the woman, having produced a bunch of keys from her pocket, was turning towards the house, when a policeman suddenly appeared and called a halt. Amidst the noise produced by the pattering of the rain and the gusts of wind sweeping through the narrow and deserted alleyway, Norna was unable to distinguish much of the conversation. Except for an occasional oath, the scene was merely a pantomime. It was evident, however, that the upholder of the law was making some demand which infuriated the woman, and to which she refused to accede. After some violent wrangling, accompanied by much vehement gesticulation, the policeman, observing that the two men —who had in the meantime deposited their burden on the sidewalk—were cautiously approaching him, drew his club with one hand, and clutching the woman by the shoulder with the other, roughly shoved her towards the still open carriage and forced her to enter. He then followed himself, giving a short, sharp order to the driver, and the carriage was driven rapidly away.

Before the woman left, however, she transferred the keys to one of the men, who now stepped quickly to a narrow door opening out of the wall of the house and directly beneath where Norna was watching. This he unlocked, and returning to his companion, they together picked up the inert body and disappeared within the building.

And now the storm which for a space had seemed to rest, reawakened in its strength, the appalling darkness relieved only by the constant play of the lightning.

Occasionally, a bolt nearer than the others illumined with momentary flare and blinding intensity the apartment where Norna was. She moved into the front room, and fastening the windows, pulled to the latticed shades from either side. Then, having turned on a low-power electric candle, which stood on a small table by the mirror, and extinguished the other lights in the room, she passed again into her chamber, where she threw herself on her bed in the dark, her over-wrought mind in harmony with the distracting chaos without. And as she lay, praying, thinking, plotting, she became slowly conscious of sounds proceeding from the front room. Supposing them to be caused by the return of Craig, she quickly sat up, bracing herself for the ordeal which she felt before her, and was about to turn on the lights preparatory to facing her husband she now knew to be her enemy, when she became aware that the mirror, which lay within her line of vision through the half closed door, was slowly swinging open, disclosing a narrow aperture behind.

No woman ever lived less a physical coward than Norna. Fear of bodily harm was neither bred in her bone, nor had it been nourished by her antecedents. Yet she caught her breath hard, and felt the blood chill and quicken in her veins as she slipped off the bed, and crouching behind an interposing chair peered with startled eyes from the darkness of the bed-room at the scene beyond.

Within the frame of the gap where the mirror had stood, was outlined the figure of a man. Norna at once recognised him as the smaller of the two she had but lately seen in the alleyway. He hesitated a moment, glanced rapidly about, and satisfied that the way was clear, stepped boldly into the room. Then, abruptly

turning back towards the opening, and supporting himself with one hand on either side of the narrow gap, he leaned over and called into the darkness beyond.

For a moment he remained standing expectantly where he was, when, reaching forward, he gave a hand to his companion, an older and more powerfully built man than himself, who carried the figure Norna had seen taken from the carriage, and which he deposited on a lounge which stood against the opposite wall.

"So that job is done, eh? And well done, too, for our end of it—with 'fifty' sure pay for me," said the younger. "Say, Jim, what's coming to you?"

"None of your d—d business, young 'un!" growled the other surlily. "Anyway, double's what Madame ought to give both of us—this cussed night."

A restless movement on the lounge caused them to turn their heads, and the one called Jim, looking at his companion, asked: "Where is she bound?"

"Dunno, for sure. Westward-ho, I reckon."

"Well, let's get out of this," ordered the elder man.

"Go 'long yourself, if you want to. I'm waiting for the slush; and I'm not going to stir a foot, neither, till I has it. I need it bad. Besides, Madame said she had a kid to put on Mother Robbins."

"No, you come with me, sonny. Get a move on! No —no—you first, Bill. Don't be so polite. It's a rotten pitch from top to bottom, eh?" As he spoke, he motioned the other to precede him, and in another minute both had disappeared.

Norna could hear the spring catch, as the door was pulled to and shut,—leaving her alone in the heart of the spider's web.

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CHAPTER XVII

THE SPIDER'S WEB

THE breath of suspicion as to her own safety, which had cast a chill over her thoughts, was lost sight of by Norna in her anxiety over the helpless girl. If she had shrunk from realising fully where she was, her eyes were now wide open; and her blood boiled at the indignity to which Craig was subjecting her. She resolved, that at any risk to herself or child, it were safer for both that she get free of him. First, she went to her bed-room, and watched from the window the departure of the men. Then coming back, she turned on the lights and made haste to where the girl lay. Arranging the disordered dress as best she could, and removing the wet and sodden skirt, she covered her over with a counterpane brought from the chamber, and began to brush back the rebellious hair from a face the most exquisite and touching in its ghastly whiteness, she thought ever to have seen. And, like Elaine's, that face

> "Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,
> But as asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled."

At once Norna felt herself unexplainably start, the wraith of a time long past wafting across her memory. She raised the girl's head and adjusted the pillow, and then hesitated as to what further action she was warranted in taking. None of the simple remedies, such as she had at her disposal, seemed to her of a character to meet the emergency. Moreover she was ignorant of the specific cause of the stupor. That the girl had been

drugged, she was sure. If the woman should return before Craig came back, she knew the girl was lost. But immediately, she reflected that she must abandon at once, and in despair, all hopes of any assistance from him. It gradually came to her, that not only the girl, but perhaps she herself also, were both caught like rats in a trap. Surely it was impossible for Craig to contemplate the undoing of his acknowledged wife! Yet, why not? What evil would a nature like his shrink from? She felt that her only safety lay in making her escape. And then she recalled how her clothes had been taken away on Craig's initiative, and that he had turned the key in the lock when he left. She dare not ring the bell. It could but hasten the end. She felt herself at bay; and stormed at her helplessness and the imbecile trust that had brought her to such a pass, upbraiding herself for the weak tool she had proved herself to be. Suddenly she straightened herself to her full height, her eyes flashing; and the courage, nerve and mental poise innate in the woman, came to her assistance and stood by her in her dire need. It was lie down supinely, or fight. And fight she would, with all her strength of hand and limb. She found the time to be well past midnight. Switching off all the lights, with the exception of the single burner by the mirror, she drew up a chair and placed herself beside the lounge, to think and plan for the strife she knew was coming.

A few minutes later Craig entered the room, shutting and re-locking the door behind him. She saw at once from his general bearing, as well as from his flushed face, that he had been drinking heavily. She had frequently seen him thus, though it had never appeared to impair his memory nor clog the clearness of his mind or speech.

Before he took any notice of Norna she rose to her feet. It was a striking contrast. The broad shouldered man—and the supple, determined woman, who confronted him. She was fully as tall as he, and for her sex, vastly his physical superior—but yet a woman.

Her voice was low and even as she addressed him.

"What sort of place are we in, John; and what does this mean?" she began, pointing to the lounge.

"What in the devil is that?" he cried in unfeigned astonishment, following the direction indicated. "A corpse? Who brought it here?"

"Two men," she replied.

"How?" he demanded angrily. She marked how his covert, slightly startled glance—immediately diverted—had stolen towards the mirror, betraying a guilty knowledge of its use.

"Through the door," Norna answered without hesitation. "How else?"

Craig was playing with one as clear and cool as himself. He failed to see anything in either the attitude or expression of the woman before him to excite his suspicion. He at once turned and rang the bell, saying to the servant he admitted,

"Send Madame here."

"She's out."

"Then tell her to come directly on her return. I want her at once." Again locking the door after the man departed, and throwing the key upon the table, he looked at Norna.

"'Madame!'" she said with contempt, looking him straight in the eye. "Is this a place to bring me?"

"What of it?" he replied indifferently, shrugging his shoulders. "So the apartment doesn't suit you, eh?"

"What of it? Suit me?" she cried, maddened in

spite of herself by his cool assurance. "I may have been a simple fool—but this is no spot for me, and you know it. I saw you, John, from the window of the other room, and the company you were with. You left me here alone; and for them!"

"Really!" he laughed—"and why not? You were so entertaining, you will remember! I had to seek other amusement. Now you've doubly made a fool of yourself—as from the first. I thought you might be nasty on my coming home, and so prepared myself accordingly. This is just the very place to tame a shrew with airs like yours—or say, to temper a fond mother."

To Craig's disappointment, Norna never even winced. She had staked out her course. Since the man's return she was becoming more and more convinced by his manner, and by every word he uttered, that not only she could neither entertain, much less rely on any promise or offer which he might advance, but that he meant to betray her.

"What will people say," Norna continued slowly, but with impassioned voice, "when they hear you have put this insult on the wife who bears your name? What will be said when it is known that you have stolen her child?"

"They may say what they like—provided they ever know of it," he retorted with a leer.

"You can't imagine I am going to put up with this sort of thing—do you? There must be some law, for me and mine, in this cursed land you've brought me to. I'll have it on you, if only for the child's sake. For myself, I'm done with you for good and all."

"Once more! Encore, I say!—No? Well, then, have you finished? Good," he drawled, "I'm agreed. You're welcome to all the law you'll ever get. Now go

ahead. Do! But first tell me what you plan. I'm curious. Perhaps I'll help you."

Norna knew he lied. A glance at the assured and cruel look on his face would alone have convinced her of that; but as yet he gave no clue by which she could fathom his thoughts.

"You don't want to tell me," he pursued. "No?"

"Send for my dress. I shall go at once. I leave as soon as this girl comes to—and take her with me."

"Really," he threw back at her sarcastically. "One, two, three," he sneered, counting on his fingers. "Self, boy, and waif to support! Well, get the dress and go by all means. You won't call on me for help? Of course not! I'm out of it, alas—discarded by my wife!

"How my friends will despair of me!" he laughed, after a pause. But Norna remained motionless; calmly looking at him, and without flinching, from where she had stood ever since he first began to speak.

"I certainly shouldn't put up with it another minute, if I were you," he said mockingly, with the expression a cat might assume as it toyed with a mouse within sure reach of its claws. "But you won't really leave me here alone and desolate? Think of my sorrow and anxiety, while you search for the dear kid!"

Norna trembled, for a moment, in her efforts to control her anger. At last, and the words came sharp, clean cut and decisive:

"Where does Mother Robbins live?"

The shot told. With a start and an oath he straightened himself up from the careless and indifferent attitude he had heretofore assumed—one leg swinging across the corner of the large square table in the centre of the room, the other resting on the ground, as mechanically

he creased and recreased a sheet of paper in his hands, the while seeking to worry and exasperate the woman standing before him.

"Who?" he snarled, raising his voice.

"Mother Robbins! I said," reiterated Norna, convinced by his manner that her blind shaft had hit its mark. "The child is there, I know. I want the address."

"Who told you that?" he exclaimed unguardedly.

"Those men who were here gave it away."

"And you're a still bigger fool to pass it on to me," he retorted, his face hardening and his air of indifference gone.

He planted himself close in front of her. "You know too much, girl. So it's war you want, eh? By God, you shall have your fill."

She stepped back as he approached her threateningly. At the same moment there was a knock at the door, and immediately Craig ushered into the room the woman Norna had seen from the rear of the house earlier in the evening. Her clothes were soaked and awry from the effects of the storm, and her heavy hard-lined face —still holding in its coarsened bloated features the illusion of a former beauty—looked flushed and angry.

"What in hell are you trying to work with all these goings on?" she cried, addressing Craig, and not heeding Norna.

"What cussedness are you up to now?" she persisted wrathfully. "And who's running this shooting match, anyway, I'd like to know?"

"Perhaps you'd best answer that yourself," said Craig with a shrug. "I came here with her," nodding towards Norna. "That girl over there was brought in while I was away."

The woman looked at him in astonishment for a moment, and then, as the truth dawned upon her how it must have all come about, she burst into coarse unmirthful laughter.

"There, calm yourself, sonny! Sure, where the devil halts he'll find you already on the spot—every time. I didn't expect you back until to-morrow. That's all there is to that."

At this juncture, a heavy sigh distracted Norna's attention, and, going to the lounge, she pulled off the girl's gloves and was beginning to chafe the cold hands, when Craig suggested that she be taken into the other room. Norna immediately gathered up the lifeless form, and unassisted carried the girl into the chamber, where she continued in her attempts to resuscitate her.

Norna had no sooner disappeared, than Craig's manner abruptly changed.

"What does all this mean?" he demanded authoritatively. "By what right do you make such use of my apartments? Where did that girl come from?"

"Why, I found her on the wharf dodging about for some gent that failed to meet her; so I caught her up instead. Then I was nabbed, just outside, on our way to the stairs," she grumbled wrathfully, with a gesture towards the mirror. "Things get worse and worse in this d—m city. Every new mayor shifts the force. It's the old story right along. I paid the last captain his cool five hundred, and the sergeant his two-fifty. Now they've put this new man on the beat; and he drives me this forsaken night clean to the station, and keeps me cooling my heels an hour while he pretends to find out where I stand with his boss—which he knows already. Then he stuck me for his own plum, against present and future trouble, and until his beat is

swapped! Finally he let me skip—skinned nearly to a dollar, too!"

Craig laughed derisively, remarking:

"Such as you, seldom, unhappily, get their full deserts. It's too bad!" He then began rapidly to question her purpose with the girl.

"Lord!" she said, interrupting him; "there's no mystery. She's Chicago freight—when I get good and ready. She's only a slip of a thing, but oh my! Talk about peaches, will you!"

And then she proceeded to tell him of her plans, the details of which, and the words and manner in which they were set forth, being better imagined than read.

"I'll bet there's three thousand waiting in the pot for me," she concluded, exultantly.

"See here," the man broke in, grasping her wrist; "did you notice the other one?"

"Yes."

"Can you at the same time clear me of her—and a cool thousand to boot?"

"Can I? Will I?" she answered. "You bet your life! Give me the chance!"

"Good! A thousand down, and—if no resurrection, mind you—add as much more in a year from now."

"Done!" she cried greedily. "I'll see to it—safe for all. And she'll never want to come back! Trust me for that. How can I best—"

"Ask no questions, but leave it to me. Have you a needle—a strong one?"

"Here, take this;" and the woman passed something into his extended hand.

"All right. Go then, and don't come to any call or ring."

"When, and for how long?" he asked, as she was

opening the door, and indicating the small bright tube she had given him.

"Oh, rather slow. Perhaps five minutes—but fearful strong. Good, at least, for half a day. Don't repeat too soon."

As the woman spoke, she looked at him with a glance of mingled avarice and admiration, and then left the apartment.

In the meanwhile Norna, leaning over the girl, was trying to resuscitate her; bathing her temples and manipulating her deadened limbs. She noticed with surprise the simple fineness and daintiness of the clothing, which, in its character and makeup, marked the modest well-bred woman of means and social status.

At last, in response to Norna's handling, a shudder ran through the inanimate form. Soon, the curved, dark lashes twitched faintly, and with a convulsive shiver the girl's eyes opened. A faint colour played over her white face, and the tremor of a whisper parted the sweet lips.

Norna bent down her head to the half-opened mouth, and her straining ear caught a faint breath. It whispered:

"Norna."

The other, startled, earnestly searched the features before her, concentrating every energy to solve the riddle of that half familiar voice whose harmony played on her heartstrings with memories of the past. But strive as she might, the forgetfulness would not pass, and the association failed to reveal itself. Again the whisper came to her:

"Norna, dear Norna, help me! Save me, Norna."

With painful effort the girl raised her arms, and,

clasping Norna round her neck pulled her towards her, her hands interlocked behind, her head pillowed on the other's breast. Then Norna felt the hands unclasp and stroke her temples, pushing back her hair with soothing deftness. Where in the old days had she felt that lingering touch, so firm, so gentle in its softness? Slowly the haze began to lift, till, with a burst, the light of memory and recall shone through, and Norna gasped in tones of awe and horror as she placed a hand on the girl's mouth and fiercely shook her clenched fist towards the farther room.

"O God! It's Miss Marston—Kate!"

Once more with muffled sound the whisper came:

"Norna! Where am I? Where is Jack?"

"Jack who?" the other asked, slightly relieving the pressure of her hand on the girl's lips. "Whisper very low, dear."

"My husband, Jack—John Ingersoll, Norna. I expected him on—"

But Norna never heard the sentence finished. Fiercely she clutched Kate by the shoulder, provoking a broken cry of pain.

"Do you know what you say?" she gasped, struggling to overcome the giddy faintness which took hold of her. "When were you made John Ingersoll's wife?"

"Two years ago—November."

It was at this moment that Craig was left alone, and Norna was startled to hear him impatiently summoning her to return. With a supreme effort she mastered her voice and answered evenly:

"In a minute. The girl has been ill and needs me. But I think I may leave her shortly." As he muttered a curse in reply, she closed and locked the door and returned to her charge.

"Tell me all about it, dear," Norna asked persuasively, though her passion was choking her.

Then by degrees she caught the substance of the story of Kate's marriage, of its secrecy, and of Mr. Marston's death—as the girl told it to her in broken sentences and with gradually weakening voice, begging her piteously at one moment to find Jack, and then not to leave her side. Immediately when she concluded, her overtaxed strength gave way, and she fell back from the half raised position she had assumed, the last look of her closing eyes before she relapsed into unconsciousness, an appealing, frightened prayer to the dumfounded and enraged woman at her side.

But towards Kate, Norna did not even for a single moment harbour the shadow of an angry thought. Nor did she for an instant question the truthfulness of her statement. The details of the marriage were too extraordinary, uncommon and unheard of, to have been either concocted or imagined by such as Kate. To Norna they bore the stamp of certain truth, and also the sure conviction that the girl had been basely betrayed, and her own life made a mockery. Yet notwithstanding her sickening humiliation and the raging turmoil in her heart, she felt for the unconscious figure an intense womanly pity.

"It's better so," she muttered through her clenched teeth,—"for a while, at least." And directly, with firm determination written on her face, and a fearless carriage, she left the room, noiselessly closing the door as she passed through.

Craig, now alone and unaware of her approach, was in the act of opening one of the windows, in order to let in a breath of fresher air to the thick unventilated atmosphere of the room. Norna on entering, immedi-

ately caught sight of the door key lying on the table, and surmised at once why it had been withdrawn. Softly treading, she stepped forward and possessed herself of it, and for a breathing space, hesitated. It flashed through her mind that she could now escape through the door, and, half clothed though she was, reach the street and throw herself on the chance protection of the first person she met. Her déshabille was a very secondary consideration to her in her extremity. But her leaving meant Kate's assured destruction, and she never gave the chance—if chance it was—a second thought. Involuntarily her eye wandered, mechanically and for an instant,—say, better, by the grace of God—towards the table. There she perceived a small box, the like of which she had often seen before, and knew its contents and their purpose. If she had not, this narrative would surely never have been written, nor she nor Kate been heard of further; for the spider had them fast, and the web was strong. Stealthily her hand closed on the box, from which she dexterously withdrew a small piston of polished steel.

"What's that you're doing?" cried Craig, slamming down the window, and turning sharply towards her.

At first, Norna made no reply. She waited until he left the wainscoting, when passing him, she pulled down the shades.

"John," she said calmly, "I've been told—you have another wife. I am glad if this is true."

"What's that you say?" he exclaimed in surprise.

"That I should be—glad—not—to be—your wife. I'd rather swallow any shame than that of being bound to a hound like you."

Craig's calculations were utterly upset, and his scheme of procedure summarily overthrown. He saw that he

had lost the power to exercise the chiefest weapon of the inquisition he meditated. He had anticipated with hellish glee her dismay when he assured her, as he intended doing, that she had never been his wife. He had this *coup de grace* in reserve, and as the final blow to her pride and courage. It maddened him to be deprived of it; still more, to have the fact itself so coolly and willingly accepted by his intended victim. But he resolved not to shift his ground. He knew he held the cards, and that the game was his; and though this single trick was lost—he'd play and win it out.

"Do you hanker for the truth?" he sneered. "Oh, you'll love me when I tell you. First, you wanted to know what this house was. You said it was no place for my wife. You're right. It isn't. Further, I wouldn't bring my mistress here, do you understand, if I did not plan to throw her over. Yes—put you on the counter. So much for you. As to the child, it may go hang!"

"I'll find this Mother Robbins, and—"

"You'll never have the chance, dear girl. I'll take care of that. Look here," he went on incisively, without altering the pitch of his voice, though his eyes glittered ominously, "what do you take me for? Do you think I would ever really marry the low spawn of a Canuck? Bah! I've been sort of hitched up half a dozen such times before. My wife was living when you came along. Do you comprehend? I was a much married man. You enticed me away, don't you see? She was in an asylum at the time, sure enough; but still her claim was legal."

Norna became ghastly white, her whole form shuddering in a passion of hate. But she continued to draw him on.

"And you have not married since her death?"

"Within a month after. It was in August when you and I met—now to part once more," he leered. "The first one died in October. You will recall that I left you in November to go down East. I see you do. There I was spliced again."

"And what was she?"

"Oh, that was an unforeseen, a lonesome marriage," he said, assuming a bantering tone, half humour, half disgust. "Generally speaking, your 'what' was a precocious little lady. Literally she's my lawful wife, bless her. She wooed me for my looks—of course! Why shouldn't I take pity on her? with her long purse and few relations; and soon to become an orphan. I was drawn into it—in a way. Sort of had to, you know," he concluded with a grimace.

"And you see her often?"

"Never. Not since many and many a day. How could I with you about?" he answered ironically, with a slight bow.

"But what are you leading up to, anyway?" he demanded, looking at her keenly. "We'll drop it—"

"Not till I get through. If you knew—"

"Drop it, I say," he repeated angrily.

But Norna paid no attention to his threatening looks.

"If you would like to know, John, she is in the other room."

Craig, who had arisen as if to enforce his commands, looked at Norna in unfeigned bewilderment.

"Who? Where?" he gasped. "Are you drunk or crazy?"

"Neither," she said calmly. "That girl in the other room tells me that she is your—John Ingersoll's wife. She speaks of you as, 'Jack.'"

For a full half minute Craig stared at her aghast. Then he gradually began to grasp where the confusion lay,—at least in part—and at once blessed the mischance which had brought within his power one who claimed wifehood with the man whose iron clutch at his throat had never been forgotten, still less forgiven. Yet, judging Jack, whom he had never heard of as a Benedict, as possibly of the same standard of morality he set for himself, he reckoned this supposititious wife as of that class to which, by parity of reasoning, she must necessarily belong.

But Craig's real, or assumed amusement, at such humour as he may have found in the situation, soon spent itself. The supercilious manner and careless indifference, which so pointedly characterised his manner during the earlier part of the evening disappeared. The tones of his voice were now keen and precise, as if he wished her to weigh the full force of each word.

"You must therefore know," he said, "that as far as you and I are concerned, our relations carry no possible claim whatever on your part; at least none that I shall ever acknowledge. Still surer, none that you will ever have an opportunity to publicly demand—or advertise!"

He paused to watch the effect of his words, and then continued more rapidly:

"Listen, girl, and make your choice. It is your last chance. You must follow one of two paths. You know too much for my safety. With that knowledge was lost whatever chance of liberty you ever had. If you will agree, however, to follow Madame's instructions without any kicking, then well and good. In that event I pledge you my solemn word that the child shall be properly looked after, and in due time restored to you.

Otherwise," and he shook his forefinger at her slowly and determinedly, "I'll make you—make you—comply with her wishes; in which case you'll never see the child again."

"And mark you further," he went on icily, a moment later;—"you have no alternative."

"I have."

"What?" he snarled. "You will be forced to one or the other, I tell you. Which shall it be?"

"Neither—" exclaimed Norna; "and because you lie, as you have always lied to me ever since the evil day I first saw your bad face, and took for a half decent man—the beast you are. Now do you listen to me John Ingersoll! First of all you're a low-lived coward," she cried, losing her self-restraint, the fierceness of her passion gathering more and more as she went on.

She drew closer to the table behind which he stood, placing herself directly opposite to him.

"A coward, I repeat; so scared of a woman's tongue and your own vile work, that there's murder, yes, worse than murder, in your thoughts! Do you think me mad or blind to trust the same cur a second time? Do you take me for a child, to be ordered about by such a devil's spawn as you? You plan to hold me here against my will? You expect, do you, to ship me off like a dog in a crate? You propose to leave me at the mercy of the degraded scum and lost souls which haunt such places as this? You say I gave myself away? You say that I know too much; that I, I, am a prisoner, and yours? Hell yawns for such as you, John Ingersoll! And you take me cheaply, do you,—as cheaply as you got me, eh? *Sacre!* It's I that go; and the girl in there, your wife, goes with me, too! You!—As for you—you'll stay here—and alone. Yes alone—alive or dead! You

sneer, will you, at marrying me? A low half-breed Canuck, am I?"—and she pursed her lips as if she would like to spit upon him. "That—for what we think of such *canaille* as you, such—"

Craig, his usually florid face blanched with anger at this tirade, as well as the biting, withering scorn in which it was uttered, completely lost control of himself, and drowned her last words by violently striking her with his closed left hand full upon the mouth. This he followed directly with a blow from his right, which landed on her forehead—its force, however, mostly spent as she reeled backwards against the wall.

Norna had foreseen some such happening as this. Had she at the time felt her old physical self, she would never for a moment have considered the course she had outlined, or have feared to match herself, singlehanded, against this man. She well knew that years of dissipation had weakened the vitality, and undermined the vigour and strength that was rightly his; and she had always had absolute faith in her own daring and supple skill, the test having more than once been forced upon her in the days of her backwoods life. Furthermore, she thoroughly believed the man to be a dastard, a craven poltroon, and she despised him soul and body. Yet she realised that her own manner of life during the past two years had sapped her strength, if not her nerve and courage.

So Norna played her accepted part, taking the punishment she had in a measure foreseen and invited. Hurt though she was, she continued to revile the man before her, regardless of the cost, if thereby she might only fetch him nearer, and withal keep him unsuspicious of her intent.

For a time Craig offered no further reply to the abuse

she continued to pour upon him,—fiercely couched in the expressive forms she had learned from her border associates; jeering and scoffing at him in English and broken French.

At last all restraint again gave way, and he started towards her with hands extended, his fingers clutching. Half way round the table, he suddenly wheeled about and reached for the box that lay upon it. Savage and malevolent was the look he turned on Norna. Slowly he raised the cover. But more revolting still was the blasphemy he uttered when he found the box was empty. He looked for the key, and missing that also, he made for the bell—to find Norna there before him, her back barring the electric button to his touch.

She was cowering like a leopard about to spring, every muscle in her pliant form tense, quivering, and alert; her breath drawing sharply between her parted lips, her body crouching low with head thrown back, her weight supported on her left foot, her knee slightly bent. Craig flew straight at her and would have caught her by the throat, when, like a bolt from the loosened catapult, her right foot swinging behind shot forward, catching him fairly in the middle just below the meeting of the ribs. With a gasp he reeled backwards, doubled up, windspent, and for a space powerless. It was a pass from the old-time science of the French sabot, the Voyageur's pastime, and ofttimes his defence against the British fist. Norna had time and again watched exhibitions of the sport given in friendly joust, and once or twice had seen it used with deadlier intent.

And now, her blood afire, she would gladly have made an end of the miscreant. She seized a chair, tempted to brain him; but recovering herself, sought her second weapon.

And then Craig, gasping and defenceless, saw Norna, her face set and implacable, coming towards him with the bright tube ready in her hand. As she stood over him he grovelled, whimpering and mumbling for mercy. But it was of no avail, for the steel point pierced him, and like a serpent's fang discharged its fluid through his veins. All too late, by a convulsive effort he launched himself upon her, throwing his arms about her neck, and striving to tighten his hold as his breath came slowly back. Then Norna fought him, hand and foot, and tooth and nail; fought him with the abandonment of reckless courage, and a fury born of confidence that soon his limbs would paralyse, and loosen. From side to side, from end to end of the long broad room, they reeled and swayed. Now they were down; now both upon their feet, striking, clawing, tearing—battling for their lives.

Slowly as the minutes passed, the man's tense grip began to weaken, and over his face spread a look of abject horror and cringing appeal, welcomed by Norna without compunction. Then his limbs gave way, his arms relaxed from her neck, and he sank limp and nerveless upon the ground.

Yet she was well aware that only the first step was won. She knew the task before her to be full of peril still. The mirror again caught her eye, and she started aghast at the reflection it now threw back. She beheld the semblance of a woman, swept with long straight black hair, matted and smeared with blood. Her clothes were rent; her face and neck swollen, bruised and cut; and her lips, where the brute's first blow had fallen, laid open to the teeth. She shuddered; then turned away, and wrapping the table cloth about her neck and shoulders, hastened to the inner room. Here she found Kate quietly sleeping, unaware of the battle that had raged

so near by. A faint colour was playing on the girl's cheeks, and her breath was coming tranquilly, while the pinched, drawn look seemed to have disappeared. Norna quickly opened Craig's valise, and took the brandy flask she made sure to find. Raising the girl's head, she forced her to drink a few drops at a time of the raw spirit, till at last she was able to stand tottering on her feet, her mind still dazed, but her limbs less weak and trembling.

After Norna had removed the blood as best she could form her face and hands, she brought Kate's clothes and helped her put them on, wet as they were. She then cautioned her not to venture further, but to remain where she was until she herself returned. Shutting the door behind her she passed on to where Craig lay. She felt no sense of fear from that quarter. The man lay like a log, and but for his stertorous breathing showed no sign of life.

Norna went straight to where he was, and at once began to disrobe him with no more feeling than she would have had in removing clothes from a dummy. Methodically, she stripped him of his trousers, coat and waistcoat; of his shoes, shirt and collar. These, she put on, and then quickly coifed her disordered hair above her head. Next to secure Craig! Casting her eyes about the room, she saw his valise, from which she rapidly removed the buckled straps. With these she tightly bound the man's ankles, and also his wrists drawn behind his back. She then dragged him to the most shadowy corner of the room, turning his face against the wall—from first to last her head askance, avoiding further recognition of those features she prayed never to behold again.

Finally, with nervous, shaking hands, she sought the pockets of his clothing, which she herself now wore.

Purse, watch and guard; his knife, cigarette case and cigars, with other odds and ends,—these she laid down one by one on a chair beside him, retaining only the memorandum book she knew he always carried. This she searched with trembling fingers. It contained innumerable addresses, together with dates and minutes of events, and business transacted. Amongst these she came upon an entry recording—year and place—her marriage; and on the same page the date he had taken away her child. This was followed by an address which read:

Mrs. C. M. Robbins,
No. — 14th Street, East,
New York.

And it was well for Craig that Norna read no further at the time—else perchance murder had been done then and there.

Uttering a wild cry of joy, she tore out the page and placed the book among the other effects which she had previously discarded. She was aware there was scanty time to waste. Her sole hope, she was convinced, both for Kate and herself, lay through the mirrored door. This, contrary to her expectation, she found to open readily to her touch. The way of escape was clear.

For a moment she hesitated, loath to approach the senseless form. But realising how much such a precaution might possibly mean to both Kate and herself, she went once more to where Craig lay and forced a gag between his teeth, holding it in place by strips from her tattered gown. Then, after binding up her bleeding mouth, and pulling the man's soft felt hat down over her forehead, she fetched Kate—bewildered still, and all

ignorant of what had taken place. Finally, girl, and pseudo man, passed from the very centre of the spider's inmost web—the venomous insect enmeshed hand and foot in a tangled woof and warp of its own weaving.

PART II

CHAPTER I

SISTER CATHERINE

IT was a wintry December afternoon late in the year 1904. A January thaw had been followed by a heavy snowstorm, to be succeeded in turn by the bitterest cold of the season, intensified by sharp piercing winds which scattered the frozen flakes like clouds of fine white sand.

Within the large hostelry, which, from its pinnacle by the ancient citadel on the hill overlooked the quaint roofs of Old Quebec directly beneath, and thence across the St. Lawrence to the twinkling lights of Point Levis and the hamlets scattered east and west through the white-robed plains bordering the historic river, sat one of the master up-builders of America's western empire, but just arrived at Quebec, after a long and tedious journey from Vancouver. To save time he had taken the northern route—so wondrously beautiful in the summer time of endless billowing wheat, of prairie life, of flora infinite in colour and variety; so cheerless when the vast plains and lofty hills are swept by wintry blasts. But the journey ended, he found himself taken with a severe chill, and sent at once for a physician.

Born in the year 1833, Philip Rheinlander in his seventy odd years of life, was not merely a witness to the rapid growth of a nation whose ever ripening development caused wonder and fear to older and more stagnant

civilisations, but had himself been a foremost pioneer and soldier in the struggles which redeemed so much of our barren wastes and inaccessible reaches, and opened them to our country's use. Friends and acquaintances he had without number, and well merited the regard in which they held him. His power and influence were enormous and far extended; achieved in part by his great wealth, but chiefly acquired and maintained by the resistless will and energy, the clear brain, the wide experience of men and affairs, and the intrepid honesty which marked his course as a potent factor in the winning of the West.

Some years previously he had withdrawn from the more active conduct of his immense business interests, and, as far as possible, placed the management of his properties in other hands, intending to pass his remaining years in travel and recreation. The battle had been waged and won, his worldly aims achieved, the goal of each ambition worthily attained. The discoveries and developments which had once engrossed his thought and purpose were now accomplished facts. The rough life of the immigrant and pioneer, the brutish fraternity of the mining camp, and the crude associations of the cattle ranch—by which, in turn, he had been encompassed for nearly two score years,—one and all had failed to stamp the impress of their coarseness upon his character, or to eradicate the kindly wellbred manner that was his by nature, and which had been cared for and nurtured in the far off days of his New England boyhood. On the other hand his extensive information, worldly wisdom and keen mental vigour, made him at all times an interesting and most agreeable companion.

His thoughts were far away as he sat in his apartment at the Chateau, awaiting the physician who had

been summoned and gazing into the bright crackling fire; its rays lighting up his strong features, and revealing the deep furrows which lined his impressive face. His great wealth was in itself as nothing to him. He had cared for it, chiefly as the proof of unquestionable success, and for the increasing power it had given him to bring about the final triumphs of his far-reaching schemes. There was no material thing in the wide world, he realised, that was not at his command. His income's income was far and beyond his most lavish personal expenditure. He felt independent also of mere social status, correctly gauging the power of gold and what it stood for, and appraising the world's cold selfishness at its true value. But he could lay claim to neither kith nor kin. Only a few years would pass, he reflected, before his race would be run and his wealth scattered hither and thither; then a little later his memory, and even his name, forgotten. His loneliness, and still more the dread of solitude in his declining days, oppressed him to a degree that threatened both his courage and peace of mind.

The doctor, on arrival, ordered him at once to bed. "You must also have a good nurse," he insisted. "You are likely to be laid up for some days at least, and should be made much more comfortable—alone as you are, and in a strange hotel. Shall I attend to it?"

"If you will, please; and if you think it necessary. But don't send a fat, frowsy old fussy-body, or you'll have me worse."

"No, I won't; not if I can help it," the other laughed. "Indeed I have a person in mind now, who would be sure to suit you. Every one likes her, and I happen to know that she is just off her last case.

"And doctor," his patient called to him as he was

leaving the room, "please drop word at the office to send her up here directly she arrives."

"I certainly will, and will see you again, myself, in the morning."

Time passed slowly, and Mr. Rheinlander began to find it difficult to conquer the drowsiness that came over him. He must have been nearly asleep, when he started fully awake and conscious of some other presence in the room. As he turned his head towards the door, a low-toned voice broke upon the quiet of the chamber.

"I am the nurse—Sister Catherine."

Mr. Rheinlander never forgot that moment, nor the picture that was framed in the open doorway lighted from the hall beyond. A young woman stood there, slender and graceful of figure; her head crowned with bright curling hair; her lovely face illumined by great lustrous sparkling eyes; her large, flexible, beautiful mouth, partially opened and expectant. Above all else there emanated a charm and allurement both in bearing and expression, that held him spellbound.

"Excuse me," he said at last. "I must have been nearly, if not quite asleep. But I am very glad you've come. Ring for my man whenever you want any special service. That door, opposite to where you stand, opens into the bath-room. Your room will be at the further end, where you had better go and leave your things. When you are ready, come back and warm yourself by the fire. There is not much to do for me, unless to make me forget this cold—and I am in no hurry to go to sleep."

The nurse did as she was bidden, returning in a few minutes clothed in white apron and cap. Unobtrusively and with practised hand she began to arrange this and

that for the comfort of her patient, while Mr. Rheinlander watched her as she moved about the chamber busied in her duties; admiring her graceful movement, so natural and unconscious.

"Would you mind, please," he asked, "repeating your name."

"Sister Catherine," was the reply.

"Most of the nurses in this country, would properly be Roman Catholics, I suppose?"

"Yes, indeed. I am a Protestant, however, and belong to no order," the nurse answered.

"Why then 'Sister'?"

"I was at one time with the army in Africa, where the soldiers called me 'Sister,' and the name has followed me ever since. I like it, too, and there is no one to object. But pardon me," she added, smiling, "I was telephoned this address, and informed that the case was only a severe cold—but I missed the name. When I arrived here the desk clerk directed me at once to your room."

"My name is Philip Rheinlander."

The nurse, who was at the farther end of the room, stopped short in her work and glanced quietly and with interest at her patient, whose face she had not yet clearly seen in the darkened corner where he lay.

"Thank you," she said, approaching the bed. "Now I shall see what may be done to make you feel easier;" and after smoothing the sheets she began bathing his hands and face.

When the tones of her musical voice first fell upon his ear, he raised his head slowly, shaking it as if to dispel some illusion. Later his keen grey eyes began gradually to seek the features and form of the woman as she moved noiselessly about. And the more earnestly he looked the

more bewildered he became—her every expression, look, and movement quickening a sacred memory—buried for half a century. Several times he essayed to speak. Finally he called her to him.

"Nurse."

"Yes, Mr. Rheinlander."

"Will you kindly tell me your name?" he asked, as she came forward, his voice trembling.

"Nurse Catherine."

"Yes—but your full name."

"Nurse Catherine, I said," she replied slowly and with distinctness, looking straight at him.

There was silence for a moment, while he gazed at her eagerly—her slim figure drawn up to its full height.

"Would you mind telling me how you came by the name of Catherine?" His tone was almost pleading in its earnestness. "Could it by any possibility have been your mother's name?"

The nurse alternately flushed and paled beneath his searching glance.

"I thought I had already answered you, Mr. Rheinlander—without being further pressed," she said. "I am known by no other name than 'Sister Catherine.' Nor do I care to be," she ended, throwing back her head, while her eyes flashed.

"Nor will I urge you against your wish," he returned, marking her poise and the spirited look, which also, by its strange similitude, bewildered him the more.

"Then we will drop the subject now," she replied with perfect composure, and was turning away when, taking both her hands, he gently held them, and with a certain courteous deference said gravely:

"Listen to me, child. I am an old man, and you will surely bear with me, and pardon my insistence. It was

not from mere idle curiosity that I asked your name and I do not want to distress you. My explanation must be my apology. Many years ago, I knew one, of whom in face and form, in voice and expression, you seem to me the living image. It appeared impossible that such a re-incarnation could have come about except through ties of closest relationship."

He paused, still retaining his hold, which the nurse made no attempt to loosen, so overmastered was she by the fervent depth of feeling which his voice betrayed.

"She also was 'Catherine,'" he continued—"a name the sweetest of all to me in those old days, whose memories linger still. When I see you, it seems as if she were here—alive again."

He dropped her hands. "It was before I married—long, long before. We drifted apart. Her home was in the East. My pathway lay further on, in western plain and mountain. Later, her troth was plighted to another. I never saw her more. Her maiden name was Catherine Pell."

As he spoke, Mr. Rheinlander glanced inquiringly at the nurse; but her set face, save for its sudden paleness, gave no indication that his relation had in any way appealed to her. She merely bowed to him when he finished, as if the incident were fully closed, saying:

"I am a trained nurse. That is all. I will send some one else to take my place to-morrow. I cannot continue the case."

There was an awkward silence, finally broken by Mr. Rheinlander's asking her to sit down. For some moments he remained silent. Finally he turned slowly towards her, speaking with a deference that compelled her attention.

"You come to me a vision of the past. Every memory

of the Catherine Pell I knew of old is stirred to life by your presence. You have not denied that she was your mother. You insist, however, that you are simply 'Sister Catherine,' a trained nurse. So be it then. Against your expressed wish I have no right to press the matter further, nor to inquire whether want or inclination, or a desire to conceal your past—"

"There is nothing in my past for me to be ashamed of, sir;" she broke in sharply, "and I beg that—"

"Nor would I believe her own word, if the daughter of Catherine Pell accused herself of any wrong," he interrupted quickly. "I should have expressed myself better. I merely meant that if you were pressed for lack of means; or, in the hope of forgetting some sorrow, were impelled to separate yourself from an old life; or for any cause whatever chose to bury the past—your reasons are your own, and not for me to question or impugn. Nor do I. But Catherine," he continued,—"and you will at least let me call you by that name—I want so very much to help you; if I may, and where I can. If you will only let me. You must not think of leaving—certainly not yet. I beg this for your mother's sake, if I am right; and on your own account in any event. You may tell me as much or as little of yourself as you like. I will not urge you against your will. But stay with me."

The kind deep voice that rang so strong and true; the sympathetic interest he manifested; the tender allusions to the memory of a parent she had never seen; the look of expectancy; and more than all the yearnings of her lonely heart, finally broke down all power of resistance, and in sobs and tears she gave the struggle up.

When she could sufficiently command her voice, she said: "My mother—was—Catherine Pell. Both my

PART III

CHAPTER I

THE CRITIC

A SEPTEMBER morning, four years later, Mr. Rheinlander and Catherine were seated at the breakfast table, having arrived in London the evening before. The former was looking through his mail, which had just come from the bankers.

"Here is a letter, Catherine, telling me that your portrait is finished and framed, and may be seen at the studio. It is dated nearly two weeks since, and by the post-marks must have followed us from place to place. I hope sometime we may have a home of our own in which to hang it. I am getting weary of knocking about, and would like to settle down."

"Oh, how I'd love to! What fun it would be!" she cried joyfully. "That is, if you didn't tire of it. I know it would do you lots of good. But I'm awfully sorry to have been so silly and childish, and to have made the fuss I did about being painted—and it was ungrateful too."

A moment later she began to laugh to herself, and at his look of inquiry, answered,

"It is sort of committal, but I know it will amuse you."

"Let us have it."

"Why, can you believe it, a man had the assurance

the other day, and because he thought that I didn't appreciate his attentions, to tell me that I was utterly and irredeemably spoiled. What do you think of that?"

"How absurd!—and impudent."

"Oh, he said lots of other things, worse still," she said cheerfully. "He was too funny about it. The trouble was, he was as often right as wrong."

"What did you answer him?"

"Answer him? Why I told him the truth, and mostly agreed with him, of course. That disarmed him at once."

"And gave him his quietus, I suppose?"

"Just so. It had to come sometime," she replied, sighing. "He was such a delightful man, though. I shall miss him horribly. I know he thinks me perfectly heartless."

"Because you were spoiled for him?"

She turned with a look of great affection, saying in a demure voice;

"I certainly didn't tell him, that it is absolutely and entirely your fault, dear, if I am spoilt. But there! As to the picture," and she half sighed, "I had so long made it an effort of my life to avoid publicity, that it became ingrained with my every action, and even now I can scarcely realise that I am a new person, and my old self forever dead and buried."

"And in place thereof, I have acquired a daughter. I can think of you in no other relation, Catherine."

She rose and came to him where he sat, putting her arm affectionately about him.

"No one could have been more a father to me than you have proved yourself," she said. "My own father, and what we were to each other so long, long ago, will always be the same sacred memory. I remember him too well, however, not to know what his gratitude and thank-

fulness would have been, could he have foreseen how you were to stand in his place."

A silence fell between them for awhile, when she said softly: "Though I pass as your niece, may I call you 'father'?"

"Dear child, it has been my heart's wish," he said, flushing with pleasure; "but I feared to distress you by asking it. Thank God for this, and that it has come from you. I am getting to be an old man, Catherine; not broken yet in mind or body—but the glass is emptying. The three score years and ten are well passed, and there is no living claim upon me. You will never desert me, I know, but I have no rights with you beyond affection—no proprietorship. Why not be my daughter, and by legal act?"

"You mean by your adopting me?"

"Yes."

"But that would force you to provide for me, and compel you to do what you have heretofore done because you love me—wouldn't it? It would also be the complete forfeiture of my independence. No, it would not be the same thing."

He looked at her with considerable amusement.

"I should have supposed, you were pretty independent now in about everything," he said, laughing. "Well let me see—I can agree not to leave you anything at all —if that is what bothers you."

"But I would not like that," she cried quickly. "You have made me care for all that money offers. I should not know what to do without it."

"Then you have never thought much about this?"

"No; except in a general way; and that somehow it would be all right of course." She considered a moment and then turned quickly towards him:

"Oh, why have you spoiled it all? Why not have left things as they were? But I can always go back to my nursing." And her eyes glistened.

"Because my mind works otherwise, I suppose; is differently made up, than that of a sweet ingenuous girl," the other answered, kindly. "Worldly contingencies should always be looked straight in the face. The converse evil to sordidness is inconsequence. By the way, you remember that tract of land I gave you long ago, don't you?"

"Yes, I know," said Catherine, her face brightening, "and several times I have meant to ask about it. You are very sure you will not miss it?" she queried.

"Probably not. If I do, I shall certainly borrow of you," he said very gravely, despite the twinkle in his eye which escaped her.

"Oh, take it all back this very minute, if there is the slightest question!" she exclaimed. "It never occurred to me that it might in any way embarrass you. I shall get along just as well without it. We can run our affairs jointly, and live the same as before."

"Catherine, more than ever you must be my daughter. I beg and urge it. Money! Well, you may rest assured that I do not need your property. But I ought to explain how it stands. Years ago, I took a lumber claim in California in payment of a debt, and later put the title and ownership in your name. It has been an amusement for me to develop this, and it has become exceedingly valuable. It could be sold to-day for a very large sum, and it belongs absolutely to you. Consequently you have now as much as you can ever need, and in fact more than you will know what to do with. You would therefore become my daughter by affection, without other consideration. And you will?"

She did not reply immediately. Finally she said, her manner very serious and thoughtful, and the tears in her eyes,

"There would be no hesitation on my own account. How could there be? It is but one of the many trusting, unexampled generosities you have shown me, since I—walked, as it were, into your life. I have no pride in this matter. I feel as if I were part of you, and belonged to you. It would make me wretched if it were otherwise. Yet your own pride, and the honour of your name are to be considered. I value them as much as you do. It would be a poor return if I allowed you to take, unadvisedly, any step in my behalf such as you propose, and which you might later regret. Forgive me. I must have time. Let us talk about it later."

Nor did Mr. Rheinlander press his request further, partly surmising what lay in her mind. But when before leaving, she addressed him as "father," the pleased look on his face gave her both courage and hope.

Ever since the time, when after many weeks of nursing in Quebec, Catherine told Mr. Rheinlander of her marriage and separation—stating both occurrences as facts simply, and disallowing further discussion between them—the knowledge had worried and perplexed him greatly, though solely on her account. A result of his long and varied mingling with every kind and condition of people, was not only a reliance on his own judgment, but a still stronger faith in his instinctive likes and dislikes, and in those intuitive perceptions which often had as much weight in forming his conclusions as the admitted premises themselves. He realised that it was somewhat difficult to understand how a young girl of seventeen, a lady, brought up as Catherine undoubtedly had been, had married—probably secretly—under such

conditions that she was willing to leave her husband at once, for good and all; and thereafter, and immediately, had cut herself off from every home tie, buried her identity, and friendless and alone set forth to earn her daily bread. Yet there was that in her face, tone, and whole personality, and particularly in her frank, open bearing, which kept his belief in her unshaken. What he most regretted was the limitations she had put upon him, which tied his hands, and precluded him from reckoning with any wrong to which she might still be exposed. However, he proposed taking her exactly as she was, despite any mystery. This he was most anxious to do if only on account of her parentage, and the resemblance she bore to the love of his youth. And it was not long before he blessed the day which brought this new interest to his life. As time went on, though nominally she passed for his niece, Catherine's position became more and more that of a beloved daughter. To her, the transition was like that from desert to oasis. Hers had been an awful experience. Her faith in humanity, all the best impulses of her heart had been wrecked. That she had not utterly succumbed, was due to the teachings of her father, her inherent force of character, and her indomitable spirit. The new life, and above all the affection and devotion given her, so filled the measure of her daily happiness, that the past forced itself upon her thoughts less often, and seldom with the old despairing bitterness. Her view of men and things began to broaden. Secure in the conviction that her identity was lost, she sought, rather than avoided meeting people, delighting in the social opportunities so long denied her. In very truth, she possessed to a remarkable degree the peculiar gift of making herself a favourite wherever she went. Conse-

quently, and as might be supposed, she received, at times, attentions more marked than her own actions fully warranted. Yet back of the indefinable charm which her mere presence seemed to exercise over men, was a certain something which the boldest dared not attempt to penetrate too far, so coldly vibrating would the pleasing mellow voice become, and so discouraging her whole attitude, at the first breath of sentiment from a man's lips.

Mr. Rheinlander had business that morning in the city, and agreed to meet Catherine, if possible, at the studio; but as he might be delayed, she was to act independently of him. Thither she went at the time appointed, and was directed to the gallery leading off from the main room. Here she was surprised to find quite a large selection of pictures on exhibition, and prominently among them the portrait of herself.

She had drawn down her veil, thus practically concealing the greater part of her features. A flush of pleasure lighted up her face as she took in the striking likeness that looked down on her from its position on the wall, and listened to the criticisms of the artist's work and the encomiums passed upon the subject. Nor could any woman with a scintilla of vanity fail to be pleased. This is what she saw:

The portrait of a lady well above the medium height, and in the very prime of womanhood. Her twenty-eight summers had rounded to perfect proportions the slim graceful figure, over which a robe of sparsely trimmed wine-coloured velvet fell from the waist in graceful folds. The low-cut, tightly-fitting bodice, framed beneath the deep chest and between the slightly sloping shoulders, a bosom the beauty of which was an enchantment. Above rose a full, slender throat and neck,

supporting an exquisitely proportioned head crowned with masses of wavy gold-brown hair, low growing on the high brow, and drawn past the tiny ears to be fastened in coils at the back. One arm, long and shapely, hung at her side; and in her other hand, half raised as if about to bring it to her lips, was a spray of crimson roses. Soft, dark blue, beguiling eyes, shone through the veiling of her deeply-fringed lids. It were useless to seek the classical ideal in the fine-cut vaguely tilted nose, the dimpled cheek, or in the red-lipped and sensitive mouth, slightly opened as if about to speak. Criticism was forgotten in the charm of an irresistible sweetness, which held one enchanted with admiration and expectancy.

Catherine knew that there was at least half an hour to spare during which she might expect Mr. Rheinlander, and began to wander about, inspecting the other pictures on view, most of which were offered for sale. Later, perceiving the room to be empty, she returned and seated herself directly in front of her portrait.

For the first time she realised, to its full extent, the extraordinary change that had taken place; and her thoughts raced back to forbidden ground, to the Grange, and the multiple snapshot pictures taken of herself and that other one together, and the sorry little figure they proved her to be. What a triumph! What a personal vindication of that which lies so close to the best woman's heart! The lank body, the concealing cap, the covered eyes—where were they? Ah, and the freckles, too! And then Catherine's face grew hard, till the crowning assurance came to her that the old feeling of misery and oppression had faded away, and that she had risen above the evil done her; that the torture, pain and mortification, the helplessness and fear were no

more; that pride, self-respect, a sense of superiority, had taken their place.

She took up a magazine that lay close to her hand, and had become interested in its perusal when she heard some one entering the room. Supposing it to be Mr. Rheinlander, she turned to address him; when, perceiving that it was not he, she once more became absorbed in the pages before her, although at the same time conscious that the last comer had seated himself on the same settee with a certain formal inclination directed to herself, and which she in like manner acknowledged.

Having finished the article she was reading, she listlessly turned over a few pages and then glanced at her watch. The stipulated time during which she might expect Mr. Rheinlander she found to have expired. Evidently he was not coming; so she prepared to leave, delaying a moment to look once more at the portrait. Then she became aware that the man beside her had risen and was standing so as to obscure her view—his back turned and his arms folded, completely absorbed in studying the likeness of herself.

It was a fine figure of physical manhood—broad-shouldered, tall and straight, and with the easy grace that she had loved so well. She shuddered, and could feel the blood recede from her face as she shrank back in her seat, chilled and trembling, her heart hammering in her suffocating breast, her mind a momentary chaos, her thoughts rioting as though she were going mad.

But it did not long endure. The crucial test had come at last! Yet it had taken her unprepared; and the shock brought confusion, and made her faint. But it ended there; while gradually it was borne in upon her that there was neither love, nor regret remaining; but

in place thereof was only loathing and contempt; that she had no sensation of fear; that for good or bad, he was no longer an interest in her life. And with the knowledge came a sense of peace, though more of pride and exultation.

Some movement on her part caused the other to turn about, who perceiving that he stood in her way, exclaimed:

"I sincerely apologise. I had supposed you were reading, and was so engaged in drinking in the beauties of this portrait, that I entirely forgot myself and stood directly in your way."

"Certainly; it is of no consequence." And Catherine gloried at the cool, even tone of casual politeness in which she heard herself reply, though the light of battle was in her eyes and she felt her face flush hotly as she added with indifference:

"I have seen it before;" and then rose to leave.

He passed his hand across his forehead, as she spoke; a puzzled, worried expression gathering on his winsome, attractive face.

"I really beg your pardon," he at last ventured, a slight diffidence in his manner. "But can you tell me whose likeness it is—if any one's? The artist is an old friend of mine, and he thinks this his best effort. So I came here expressly to see it. He is out of town, and there appears to be no catalogue."

Catherine vouchsafed no reply, and he continued with genuine enthusiasm:

"The technique is admirable, and the shades and tints exceptionally good. As a work of art, it is certainly splendid." And he looked at her with the old boyish smile that made her heart jump in response, despite the anger and disgust his presence caused.

"Pardon me; but what a glorious, exquisite woman—a face to worship," he ran on, not noticing her apparent lack of sympathy with his criticism. "Truly a rare model for a painter! Idealised of course. His wildest fancy will never create anything better."

He paused; when Catherine, who felt herself becoming more and more incensed, broke in with icelike incisiveness:

"You will excuse me," and made as if to go. She felt faint and stifled, and in all forgetfulness raised her veil for air as she rose from the settee and turned towards him, inclining her head with the barest acknowledgment before she left the room.

The other bowed politely, and then visibly started as her features revealed themselves; while his face crimsoned with annoyance and mortification, as it instantly dawned upon him that it was the original with whom he must have been speaking. Unconsciously he took a step towards her—at which she pulled her skirt to one side that it might not touch him, and departed, stiffly drawing herself up to her full height. He gazed blankly after her retreating figure, and thence at the portrait.

"What in the mischief did I say—or didn't I say?" And then he added, half amused and shrugging his shoulders: "However, such a woman must realise it was purely an accident—though I certainly did rub it in pretty hard! What a beggarly mess I made of it."

CHAPTER II

REVELATIONS

"CATHERINE," remarked Mr. Rheinlander that evening, when they were alone in their parlour at the hotel, "tell me all about it."

Catherine, who some time before had allowed the book she was reading to drop into her lap, and at the moment was absently gazing into the dull fire that smouldered in the grate, replied, without turning her head:

"About what, Father?"

"You are not yourself, dear. What is preying on your mind—and indeed has been since you came back to luncheon? You appear at one time pleased and gratified, and then dejected and unhappy. How may I help you?"

Catherine rose and went to the window. There she remained without answering for several minutes. Finally she pulled down the shades, and, returning, stationed herself in front of Mr. Rheinlander, her back to the fire.

"Three years since and more," she began slowly and gently, "you accepted me, not for what I was, but for what I appeared to be; moved chiefly, I believe, by the fact that I was the daughter of one you once loved. At that time you gave me a promise. Never directly or by the slightest intimation have you sought to possess yourself of my secret. Do you think I have not fully appreciated this; that I have not been both as-

tonished and grateful for such supreme trust? You took me to your very heart, unknown, unvouched for, although you knew I was married and separated from my husband, and that there was a mystery attached to me. You have given me home, position and love. You have taken me out of the slough of despond, of fear, of wretchedness. You must surely understand my gratitude, and the sincerity of my respect and love for you. Yet no one save myself can fully comprehend the depths of either. And now you crown it all by asking, yes, urging me to become legally your daughter. My heart is too full to tell you what I feel. Whether I am your daughter by adoption or not, it cannot, shall not alter our personal relations in the least. You are always present to my mind as 'father.' You always will be. Yet it is your right that you should know more of me than you do, and that you should hear my whole wretched story, and I—"

He interrupted her quietly:

"You need not tell me another word, unless you really want to, yourself—though I should dearly like to have you."

"But I do want to." She paused a moment to collect herself, and then went on more rapidly:

"You saw my portrait this afternoon, finished and complete in its frame. Was the likeness good? Was it a true one?"

"You appear to be satisfied yourself," he said, smiling.

"Now look on this other picture, its counterfeit presentment. That is what I was once!"

She handed him as she spoke a small card, on which was the likeness of a young girl, with glasses, cap, and thin peaked face.

Mr. Rheinlander examined it with care, and then looked inquiringly at Catherine, and back again at the photograph.

"Yes, but what is the connection?" he demanded. "I don't quite understand."

She laughed—not a happy laugh—saying contemptuously:

"That? Why, that is a portrait—and flattered likewise—of a poor, ignorant, foolish, but trusting child, whose affections were wrecked on a degenerate brute. It is the picture of a bride—and in her wedding dress!"

"What do you mean? She is a mere child!"

And then Catherine began and told him of the Grange; the life that she and her father led; of Wolfine, of Nat and Judge Eggleston; of the parish and her poor, of her birds and flowers; of her illness. And then she described her marriage, and how it came about; and all that passed between them; and how the rites were sanctified; and how they parted. Also of her father's sickness, their journey west, and of her father's death.

And then she drew her breath hard and spoke of Norna; relating in every particular the horrors of that gruesome night, both what she herself remembered, and what had been told her. Of how, on making their escape at the break of day, she and Norna had gone at once to the latter's rooms; of the cruel pain her friend had suffered from the blows received; and likewise of her own condition—sick and weak of body, bewildered in mind, and with broken heart. She described, also, how later they had sought the address of the Robbins woman, to find that Norna's child had been turned over to a foundling asylum. Here again on inquiry, they were informed that the boy had died very shortly after

its arrival. She rehearsed also Norna's account of the incidents leading up to the final scene at the apartments, and of Norna's marriage and life with her supposed husband. She recounted how they both had fled to Montreal. She depicted their struggles there—ignorant all the time whether the charge of murder lay against them. And, further, of Norna's departure with her parents to Alaska, and of her own experience as army nurse in the Transvaal war; and then of her return and life in Quebec—from first to last shunning no detail, nor shrinking from the full relation of her past.

Mr. Rheinlander listened from the beginning with absorbed attention, not once offering to interrupt, as point by point—now pathetic and overcome with sobbing, and again scornful and angry, she told her story—his face a study of stupefaction, concern and wrath. When she had finished, he broke out fiercely:

"And the fellow's name; who is he?"

"I have never spoken it since."

"How so? You think I know him?"

"You may judge for yourself, Father." And producing another photograph, she handed it to him with averted face. "Now study it, and tell me!"

He looked at it carefully, and then with utter astonishment at Catherine.

"Why!—What?—It is impossible!" he protested, jumping excitedly to his feet. "Do you know what you are saying? Are you aware whose picture this is? Or am I mistaken?"

"You must name him yourself."

"Why, that is an excellent likeness of my young friend Ingersoll—John Ingersoll."

"Yes."

"Great God, girl, are you crazy! Or am I? That boy a low reprobate; a mean, pandering, degenerate rascal; a betrayer of innocent woman? No, no! It is beyond comprehension! Look at it again."

"I have no need to look. I took the picture myself."

"But it cannot be."

"Therein lay his power and success; for so any one would think, as I myself did—once."

"I supposed that I possessed some knowledge of men, and I believe I do still. It is impossible, I say. I know him well. He and his mother were once my guests, on the same Mediterranean cruise that you and I took last year."

"Yes, I know."

"It is hard to bring myself to understand such a double personality existing in the same man. Assuredly not in him! I can't believe it! If he was normally what he appears to-day, and his original self had temporarily become a prey to some evil spirit, it might be barely comprehensible. But even then, the ineradicable marks would remain; somewhere, somehow in body or mind the yellow streak would be sure to betray itself. No, John Ingersoll is a man of character and principle. He shows to-day no slightest inkling of the reformed roué."

"Then so much the more a hypocrite."

"I cannot grasp it all, Catherine! To think, too, that he has been your husband for twelve years!"

"In name only—absolutely and only in name," Catherine cried.

"Yes, yes."

For some time neither spoke.

"Come here, Catherine," requested Mr. Rheinlander

at last, his manner more composed. "Never have I been so startled, so utterly dumfounded. As for yourself, this but endears you to me the more. I am so very glad though that you have told me, and that I may now share your burden. My worldly shoulders are much broader than yours—and, dear, you ought to have told me of this, long ago."

"What could it have availed? Nothing."

"That I cannot believe."

Mr. Rheinlander became lost in thought, his mind concentrated on what he had just heard.

"Catherine," he said, after fetching some papers from a drawer in the table—and he spoke very determinedly, "you will please sign these, agreeing to become my adopted daughter. I insist upon it—now."

She signed them mechanically, and then threw her arms about him, sobbing out her overcharged feelings while he soothed her with endearing words till she became calmer.

"There! that will do you good, Catherine. Now then, you will become my lawful daughter, and your welfare is more than ever my first and absorbing interest in life. It is my right. You have bestowed it on me. I shall take full advantage of it?"

"In what way?" she asked nervously.

"Catherine, I heard your story without a single question. Never has anything so stirred my sympathy and indignation! It maddens me through and through, and beyond words! But—"

"There are no 'buts,' Father."

"Come, sit down, right here, dear. Now listen a moment to me. Every detail you related is burned into my brain. Each and every word, I know, beyond the slightest peradventure of a doubt, to have been honestly

uttered. You have risen above a great misfortune. You have survived what must have killed or crazed most women. Let me ask a few questions."

"Well?"

"Now tell me, in the first place, about this 'Norna.'"

"As true and noble, as honest a creature as ever—"

"Yes, yes," he interrupted. "Do not, please, misunderstand me. I believe all that of her from my heart—God bless her—and more, too. I mean, however, to sift this matter to the dregs."

And then he examined Catherine closely. And she told him all she knew about Norna; of her family and antecedents; of her character and disposition; of her unselfishness, and the intrepid bravery which had saved them from a fearful fate.

"Have you heard from her, lately?"

"No, nor do I know where she is. Probably somewhere in Alaska."

"Are Judge Eggleston and Gibson living? I once knew the former, very well."

"I do not know. How could I?" she asked, her voice breaking.

"Then with the exception of Norna, you have never—since leaving New York—seen or heard from any of them in all these years?"

"Yes—one of them—and to-day," she replied tersely.

Mr. Rheinlander glanced keenly at her, as he queried:

"Which one was it?"

"My—my—Oh! don't!"

"I must, dear. It is better so, and have it over. But you need not answer the last. I think I know."

He continued to ply her with questions, many seeming to her irrelevant. But she submitted patiently—answering as best she could. After a pause, he began

pacing through the room with angry, rapid strides, till at last, stopping abruptly and resuming his former place at her side:

"Catherine," he said, "hear me a little further still, and do not misjudge me. Do not think that the remotest particle of all the trust and sympathy I am capable of, is any way lacking in your behalf. In fact I am so hot to get my clutch on that villain's throat, that, if I met him at this moment, I should be loth to answer for the consequences—provided it was the right one. Do you understand me?"

"There can be but one," she answered, somewhat taken back. "You know who he is."

"No, that is my difficulty," he said with a slight hesitation.

She sprang up from her chair. "You don't mean to say that you accuse Norna of inventing such a—"

"Not in the least. But sit down, dear. No. That, I regret to admit, would seem to be impossible. Her story, taken with yours, does not allow any such supposition. Would that it were otherwise. Norna related the incidents as they happened. I have no doubt of that whatever. Her account hangs together too closely for her to have misstated or misconceived what took place; and that, too, with every allowance for excitement or prejudice.

"Then what more is there to say?"

"Catherine, there is often a wide gulf separating the fact and the view of it given by the most truthful narrator. What Norna told you of this man, and of her own knowledge, I accept as truth. What she acquired from his statements is not necessarily true in fact. It would be absurd, and at once beg the whole question to suppose him incapable of lying."

"I never considered that," she admitted. "But it would make no difference as to his identity," she added wearily, "if that is what you mean. Excuse me a moment, and I will show you why."

She left the room, returning directly with a packet in her hands. This she at once opened, and laid the contents on the table before her.

"Now look! Here is an exact copy, taken by myself, of Norna's marriage certificate. These are original leases of different apartments where Norna and he lived together as man and wife. Here are a large number of receipts for provisions, clothes, etc.—some thirty odd bills in all. This one is for the child, addressed to him and signed, as you see, 'Martha Robbins.' Look at them. His name on every one! I knew from himself that he was in Canada about the date of Norna's marriage, and returning from a fishing trip. He told me so himself. And look at this, and this, and this," she cried, handing him different documents and letters. "There is not the slightest room for any mistake or doubt. Yet what would they all together have been to me, compared with this?"

Trembling with passion, she thrust a silk-faced wallet into his hands. "I made that thing myself. There are his initials, which I embroidered. It held that very picture I first showed you. He was never to let either leave him, but was always to carry the one within the other in his breast pocket,—above what he was pleased to call his heart! Faugh!"

"How did you come by it?"

"I chanced to notice it when Norna was searching his things at the place they lived, and asked her to give it to me, telling her I had made it. Then as now it was filled with trout and salmon leaders—as you see.

Norna never even opened it, nor knows to this day that my photograph lay concealed in the lining. His, and mine—the same I just showed you. I returned both to the place I took them from, and on the morning we left New York for Montreal placed them in this package. Since then, neither of them have been removed or looked at, until now."

She gasped for breath before continuing her indictment, her hands pressed against her bosom.

"And see! This is a picture of Wolfine—with the date in my own handwriting—of which I had the duplicate. It was given him by me, and was also in this wallet." She kissed the photograph again and again, bursting into tears. It was some moments before she could proceed.

"Did we not know that he arrived on the very steamer where I sought him? Look at that likeness of myself, and remember how he described his bride to Norna. He needs must call her a *'precocious kid,'* and conquered by his handsome face—or words to that effect. Remember how he *pitied her!* How he spoke of a *long purse and no relations*—and counted on her father's death! And oh, my God! how he was *'drawn into it and had to'!* What is there more to ask?"

She finished, and remained standing, her frame convulsed and quivering with passion.

"Give me those papers, Catherine," he said, his eyes scintillating through narrowed lids.

She looked at him, at first in some doubt.

"What will you do with them, Father? But I care not a whit what becomes of them all! Take them if you like, but never let me see them more. I should rather never speak of them or of him again as long as I live!"

She came close to him, and placing her hand on his shoulder, looked searchingly into his face:

"Did I not do right? Was there anything else for me to do? I have your approval—yes?"

"You more than have it, child," he answered in part. "But I intend to take a hand in this," he went on hastily. "You have rights that should be protected. I mean in the first place to see what disposition was made of your father's estate, and how far, if at all, the love of money may have been at the root of this matter. It generally accounts for a good deal that goes amiss. Also what has been done with the Grange; and generally, in regard to your father's affairs. Do not be anxious, dear. I shall do nothing to betray you."

"The dear old Grange," she sighed, the tears rolling down her face. "I wonder what has become of it. How I should really love to see it once more—despite of everything! And Wolfine! Oh, you should have known Wolfine—the only one of them all I have longed to see again. And now she will have died, and I shall never see her!" And with broken speech she told him what the dog had been to her.

The other listened carefully, but made no answer.

"Oh, Father," she said later, trying to force a smile and looking anxiously at him; "I feel as if a mountain had been lifted off me. But you are tired, dear. Forgive me, and forget it all."

"Not as long as I live, and until the account is squared."

"You must not, Father. Let him alone. He is not worth while. It would only serve to stir me up again, and excite what hatred and bitterness still remain. Oh, how I loathe and despise him!"

"But, Catherine, you loved him once."

She started as if stung, and her face became very white and drawn.

"No, no, not that! Him I never loved. I did love an unreal dream. Never the living man. The dream is now as dead as it was always false."

Again he drew her to him, comforting her as he might; talking to her tactfully, and questioning her with a tender solicitude that gradually laid bare every thought and memory, in their relation to her past.

When they were parting for the night, he detained her to say:

"You asked me just now if you had done right. I understand Judge Eggleston was away at the time in Europe. It did not occur to you, possibly, to appeal to Gibson?"

"Yes, it did; but I was half dazed, and did not know whether I could fully trust him or not. I had no faith in anybody. I may perhaps have been wrong in his respect. They were intimate friends, too. Now tell me I did right."

"He seems to have blundered, at all events, and all along the line," said the other reflectively. "I feel assured, however, that he had no hand in this. From your standpoint, Catherine, young, inexperienced and beset as you were, there appeared no course open except the one you followed. Your first instinct was that of self-preservation. You believed your name and reputation, your personal safety to be at stake; and, more than anything else, you wished to bury in oblivion every association with the past—every reminder of the outrage that had been perpetrated. I think you did right, —certainly morally; but whether the better judgment was exercised, or not, depends on what the future may

reveal; and that again on the accuracy of our premises —on—"

She interrupted him. "But I have proved to you their truth, Father. There can be no question there."

"It would seem so," he promptly admitted; "and we will not discuss that point further—this evening. So let us come to the situation as it exists to-day. No stigma attaches to your old name. Your former entity is lost. You are now my daughter,—differently circumstanced, and with a right to my name. No, you certainly did no wrong. You have also shown great capabilities and consummate force of character. Yet at the same time, Heaven must be praised for such a fortuitous outcome! The whole affair is inconceivable."

"Yet you think that something is lacking?" Catherine queried, a despondent look on her face.

He gazed at her long and earnestly before replying:

"No, not exactly; and I assure you that you have my unqualified respect regarding your actions throughout the whole of this miserable business. It is of the present and the future that I am now thinking. Catherine, you made a glorious fight for yourself. For yourself, I say. So far you have won. You have still to wage battle against the poison of hate. You must not let this further destroy your trust in mankind—in human nature. You must not suffer it to corrode your better feelings. You are still a very young woman—but twenty-eight, and in life's prime. The world is before you. You have health, and wealth. Our wealth, I tell you. You have mind and presence with which to enjoy it, to make the best of yourself, to help others. Take heed that your sufferings in no wise sour your life; that your individual triumph is not too exultant. Be fair and just to yourself. It is your right. But

likewise be the same also to others. Henceforth seek and see the brighter side of things. Be really above the past; truly superior to it—in soul and spirit. Not merely in a single relation, but in all relations. Remember, a man's soul is the breath of God. Never forget your womanhood, nor the duties it imposes—no matter how hard the struggle. You have wifehood also. Keep that ever in mind."

"But you cannot expect—" Kate began, stricken with dismay and apprehension.

"I expect nothing," he interrupted decisively and with marked firmness, not wishing her to finish the sentence. "Catherine, one may be-devil his mind with evil remembrances and imaginations, or may struggle to view adversities from a loftier standpoint—with a fuller justice. But I have sermonized enough. So no more for the present, my daughter—and good night. God bless you, dear. It was He, certainly, who sent you to me."

Upstairs, through many a lonely hour, Catherine tossed feverishly upon her bed. The occurrences of the day had severely shaken her. Her overtired, unnerved body at first refused to yield itself to sleep; her mind picturing the panorama of her life. Ever present, in the foreground, loomed the form and figure of the man she had seen that day for the first time after so many years.

" 'Wifehood!' " she cried, suddenly, in her despair. "What could father mean by that? What does that word hold for me? That I am bound to such a thing as he, as part of him, till death gives release? For how long must I be tormented with this hate and loathing? Forgive him? God help me, how can I? A 'man's soul'! Is it conceivable that such men as he are born

with the divine spark? Or is it possible to save what is lost, what no longer exists? What duty do I owe? His wife? Am I to play his guardian angel and strive to bring him back to better things?" and she laughed bitterly at the absurdity of such conception. "Oh, what it might have been!" she wailed—and then gave herself up unrestrainedly to her anguish.

Suddenly another way of looking at it seemed to dawn upon her mind, and she stopped short, recalling Mr. Rheinlander's words, and again spoke her thoughts aloud:

"Yes, he is right. Father himself might have said the same. Wifehood! Yes, a man's soul is first the 'breath of God.' Oh, who or what am I to wish to destroy it further?"

She fell on her knees beside the bed, and prayed for help—as she had never prayed before. This brought her strength and resolution, so that when she rose her face was calm. Her thoughts no longer tossed on such troubled waters, though she knew that full self-mastery would be long in the winning. Nor would she dwell further on the subject that night, but resorting to the custom which as a child she had been taught to follow, she lit the candle by her side before going to bed, and opening her Bible at random, read:

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

And the restfulness of peace came to her at last, and soon she was lost in slumber.

For more than an hour after Catherine left him, Mr. Rheinlander profoundly considered each detail of the story just revealed to him.

"I may have been wrong," he reflected, "in venturing what I said to her. Perhaps, too, I am entirely astray.

"But by Heaven," he cried out at one time, bringing his fist down savagely; "I have played this game of life too long to be afraid to trust myself. I am going to unravel the truth at any cost or forfeit.

"John Ingersoll? Not for one instant possible! I will prove it too! There are numberless dissemblers in the world, but that boy hasn't the make-up for such degeneracy.

"Yet the evidence against him, at the first blush, is absolutely damnable," he muttered later. "It staggers one. And what if it were false, and this tragedy has been needless?" Again he was lost in conjecture, and the possibilities of the future.

"Yes, yes, perhaps that is what it's coming to. They must work this drama out for themselves, and the truth between them be as clear as the sun. That is the one way. My part must be played behind the scenes. We shall see!"

CHAPTER III

THE RETURN

THE community at Dorset was astir with curiosity and anticipation, for the Grange had been leased, and the prospective tenants were expected to take possession on this late afternoon, of the final day of the year, 1908. A small gathering of village gossips hung about the station, as the far-off toot of a locomotive, echoing from the neighbouring valley heralded the near approach of the train, all eager for a first glance at these newcomers, who were to occupy the house of their former neighbour, the parson.

A lady and her maid descended from a forward car; to be immediately joined by a man servant from the rear, who conducted them to the waiting sleigh. Here, having seen them well disposed and covered against the cold, he departed to attend to the baggage, while the others were sped away into the wintry night.

Since the day when Mr. Rheinlander both startled and overjoyed Catherine with the unexpected statement that he had concluded a lease of the Grange, her heart had been full of gratitude, added to the joyful anticipation of again seeing her old home, and once more living amidst its tender associations. The time that intervened was one happy dream of expectancy. Her heart had quickened, and she felt her face flush, when, peering through the frosted windows, she first made out the snow-capped peaks, for every one of which she had at once a name and an association. In the limited

time given her at the station, she recognised nobody. This depressed her a little, although she had known all along that she would have to begin as any stranger would, if only for her safety's sake. Yet she had small fear of recognition, for she had learned that her former household servants were gone and scattered, and none of the villagers had seen her face on her return from the fatal Western journey, and before the heavy mourning veil concealed her features. Moreover she was confident that all resemblance to her former self must now be definitely effaced, and the young girl's entity lost in the woman she had become. Not even Judge Eggleston was an exception—only Nat. Well, she must run that gauntlet; and in any event he could be easily managed. Yes, there was one other, James. But then, he was so unutterably stupid that she need fear no danger there. How her heart would have rejoiced if it had been possible ever to see Wolfine again—brave, affectionate, faithful Wolfine!

And here she was at last; every moment drawing nearer to her home. She trembled slightly when the music of the sleigh bells changed its rhythm, and the horses commenced the ascent of the long approach to the house. She would have greatly preferred the simpler outfit she was formerly accustomed to—handling the reins herself. It would have been so much more natural; so much more like old times. It would have been a welcome in itself. But in all this she had been governed by her father's wishes, who decided that, since in the world's eyes she came as Miss Rheinlander, his daughter, she ought to appear as such in every particular. Nothing must be done in any way suggesting Kate Marston. Catherine herself must also forget her, as far as was possible.

They were now on the plateau, in the shadows of the dark pine woods on the easterly side; and she strained her eyes to catch a first glimpse of the house, which, brilliantly lighted, was soon disclosed to view as the avenue deflected sharply to the left, and the horses stopped before the door.

At once eager, joyful and trembling, she passed beneath its portals; then slightly shivered, as she met the strange formal faces of butler and housemaid, and breathed the odour of freshly done floors beneath the cold and newly papered walls. She missed the cheery, personal welcome, which had greeted her in her childhood. All that had once made her home what it was, appeared to have vanished, leaving only the outer shell behind. She had foreseen and dreaded this, in part, but had not supposed the impression would be so overpowering; and she felt so desolate, forlorn and out of place, that she would have liked to hide herself away and cry. She was standing just within the entrance, almost unconscious of the trained hands relieving her of her snow-boots and heavy furs, when her eyes fell upon the portières drawn across the library door, concealing the one room, which above everything else connected with the place, she had longed to be within—to revel in its books, its fire, its ease, and loved remembrances. Forgetting herself for an instant she started impulsively forward; and then as quickly drew back, addressing a personage who seemed to be in authority:

"Mrs. Tibbetts, the housekeeper, I believe? There is a large library, I understand."

"Yes, Miss Rheinlander;" said the woman, coming forward, "at the end of the hall. Will you be shown first to your room?"

"No, thank you. If you will please see at once to my things being taken up." And having thus dismissed further attendance, Catherine entered the library, alone.

An exclamation of delight escaped her lips as she drew the portières aside. Standing on the threshold, her spirits rose, for here, and at once, she felt a measure of the old time welcome. This indeed was home. Everything seemed exactly as she remembered it. There hung the crayon of her mother above the fireplace—its frame dressed, as in her father's time, with mountain laurel. Two corners of the room were filled with masses of berried holly; and facing these, slenderer boughs of fir and hemlock, exuding their resinous fragrance, were banked against the walls. Each chair and table was in its well-remembered place; each rug, cushion and ornament precisely where she had been wont to see them. She stepped up to the long library table, to find it covered with the same periodicals and pamphlets as before. She glanced at these and found them to be the latest issues. At the end of the table, two newspapers, of that date, lay beside the familiar writing materials and portfolio—on the very spot, where, on arrival, the daily mail was formerly left. There in the centre was the large Satsuma vase, filled with flowers—her favourites too; all arranged in quantity and grouping, faultlessly to her taste. She pinched the petals of those nearest, scarcely admitting they were really there and not phantasies—mocking her. About the room, lights had been turned on—but those only to which she had been accustomed. To the right, at the place where she had been in the habit of reading, a chair, her own particular chair, was drawn up between a table on one side—holding a bunch of single violets and some books especially her own—and on the other a standing work basket, also

hers. She raised the lid of the latter, and drawing therefrom a dainty kerchief, with threaded needle still fastened in the partly finished monogram,—recalled it as the last needlework on which she had been employed.

And so throughout the room, she found everything a duplication of what she remembered it to have been in the old time, and had ever since pictured it in her heart. The very atmosphere was redolent of welcome. She was somewhat bewildered and stupefied. But the peace and contentment it produced left her no room to analyse how it had come about. Soon, oblivious to all else, she was hurrying from place to place, finding all things ready to her touch, and with girlish enthusiasm taking up the threads of many years ago. She was interrupted by the announcement that dinner was served.

This she had barely finished, when Mrs. Tibbets begged permission to speak with her, bringing the information that her baggage had missed making connections and would not arrive at the station until daybreak, but that she would endeavour to make her comfortable for the night. Catherine detained her to make inquiries about the Grange, knowing that the woman had been its housekeeper for a number of years; and it was not very long before a general idea was given her of what had occurred since Mr. Marston's death.

"Yes, Miss Rheinlander, I was very glad to return, as I liked the place very much. You see, I had been here since eighteen months after the Parson died; and though I always had two girls with me, it was a bit stupid at times. We had very little to do, and not a soul but ourselves ever slept in the house. Yet we had to keep it all aired, and ready just the same. I never knew Mr. Marston myself, but he must have been a lovely man.

Everybody says that of him. But eight years is a long spell to keep open house, for nobody."

"Do you mean that it remained empty during all that time?"

"Yes, and no, Miss. It was this way. After the Parson—that is Mr. Marston—died, the servants stayed for nigh on to two years, and then they got sort of discontented having only themselves to look at, and Mr. Gibson sent them all away. He got me from Portland, and I ran the house as it was run before—in the Parson's time you know—and saw to getting the rest of the help from home."

"I do not understand."

"Well, you see there is a Miss Marston, who went away and lived in Europe. Now she made Mr. Gibson, who helps look after her money, keep the house open and the place kept up and ready for her, in case she comes back all of a sudden. She had queer notions, I guess, and no end of dollars have been thrown away. After backing and filling for nigh on to ten years, she finally determined, and only last summer, that she will probably never return to this country, at all."

"You are quite sure of that?"

"It was Mr. Gibson that told me so. I was discharged in June, and the house closed; but Mr. Gibson promised to recommend me if ever there was a chance here again —and I am much obliged to you, Miss Rheinlander."

"I am very much pleased you came. You have certainly made this room most attractive and pretty."

"And that was easy enough, Miss. You see, all those years I had to see to it that it was kept summer and winter as you find it to-day. It would have been all my place was worth to do otherwise. Lord alive, the trouble I've been at with the boughs and vases! Every

vase had to be kept filled with flowers, and the particular kinds according to the season, and always fresh ones, too; and if James—the gardener, and he's sure a case, Miss—wouldn't give me what was needed, I had to get them from the city or where I best might—and I've never slipped up once. And the same thing with the lights, and Miss Marston's bedroom, and all these tables and fixings. And I always had to have food ready—which we would eat ourselves the next day. So when I opened the house again, expecting your coming, I just did what I'd done before, and because it came sort of natural like."

"But these magazines and papers?" Catherine asked, pointing to the table.

"Oh, their yearly subscription hadn't run out, and I put them there, as I used to. They won't come any more after to-day, unless you've ordered them."

"I believe it was Mr. Gibson who leased us the house. Does he own it now?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. Leastwise he runs it and pays all the bills. He's a widower, Miss, and does business in New York, though he regularly comes to Dorset to visit his child and mother."

Catherine rose from where she was sitting, and went toward her old sanctum leading off the library. Here she likewise found that nothing had been altered, except that all photographs were removed.

"These walls seem to have lost some pictures," she remarked.

"Yes, I noticed that the first thing after I came back. You can see where their places are numbered. But I had to be just as particular about this room too, and the same with the one upstairs."

"Upstairs?"

"Miss Marston's bedroom, I mean. Every night I had to see to it that the bed was turned down and her things laid out. They are now all put away in her closet, which I understand is not included in the lease. They may be a trifle small, but I guess there is no harm coming, if I let you have them for one night, seeing you are left without a stitch to sleep in. If you will excuse me I will attend to it at once."

"And so they expected me to come back!" she mused scornfully, when alone. "To return any old time these ten years; and," casting her eyes about the room, "all this was done in a forgiving spirit, I suppose! Just as if I were a naughty child who had run away from home; and that they might prove to the prodigal that her sin was forgiven, and her repentance preordained and prepared for! 'They'!" she continued. "And who are 'they'? If I thought that he had the slightest hand in it! But no, my return was the last thing he could have expected or wished. It was Nat, of course; dear, simple-hearted, thoughtful old Nat. And the estate paid for it, I imagine, until I was given up. If I can only make Nat my friend anew—and he is to call here to-morrow."

She summoned her maid, that she might be shown formally to her apartment. Here she was again astounded by what she saw, and at finding how every detail of arrangement kept up with her recollections. Her Bible, her own combs and brushes, her light blue wrapper, and even the girlish nightgown folded on the bed above the pink slippers she had worn but a few times —besides those other many and indispensable little contrivances which every woman deems peculiarly her own —all were in their old-time places. She was, however, completely tired out, body and mind. And the distant

barking of a dog falling upon her ears as she went to bed, her thoughts wandered into a dreamland where she met Wolfine.

A gentle breeze, closely following on the footsteps of the dawn, had dispersed the mists hanging over the valley and shutting out the frost-laden trees and frozen waters, when, early the next morning, Catherine, for the first time in twelve years, looked out upon the old familiar landscape of forest and towering peak, the sun slowly rising from behind a distant gable over the rugged treetops that lined the mountain sides, and over the white pastures below. Later when she crept back to bed, her spirit was more contented and restful than it had been for many a day.

She had hastened to the Grange directly on landing from the steamer, and did not expect that Mr. Rheinlander, whom she left in New York, would join her for several days to come; it being his purpose, that she should all alone undergo the pleasure and the grief, and also the inspiration incident to her return, and thus in her own way adapt herself to her surroundings. Contrary to her expectations, however, she was in no wise lonely. There were too many distractions and reminiscences for that. After breakfast, she set about inspecting the grounds and especially the garden. There would be plenty of time before Nat was to be expected, she argued; and possibly she might get a glimpse of some familiar face. She threw a shawl about her shoulders, and with uncovered head was on her way to the door, when she stopped in the hall and sought her pruning knife, to find it, as she intuitively felt she must, in the same drawer where it formerly was kept. How all these things added to her happiness, she reflected; and how

these associations, everywhere maintained, helped her to take up her old life as if she had never been away.

The path to the garden was cleared of snow, and she eagerly noted every tree and shrub, and marked how they had prospered. For some time she strolled about the hedged enclosure where her pet flowers had been. She remembered too the bird life, and calculated its advent, species by species as the Spring advanced. Then she wandered down to the orchard, observing and counting the deserted nests. Here she came unperceived, as she supposed, upon an old man, slightly bent but sturdy still, and busied pruning. With pulses quickening, she watched him for a while, longing to show her delight and greet him as she would once have done —this old friend, who, in his way, had been a companion to her earliest childhood.

"Good morning," she said.

"Good morning, Miss," he replied, without turning round, or discontinuing his work except partially to uncover his head—now white as snow, where she remembered it as red.

"I am Miss Rheinlander."

"I supposed the like," the man drawled, squinting towards her; and she could not refrain from smiling at the blunt tone and manner, which time had neither softened nor improved.

"Are you the gardener?"

"In summer. There b'aint no garding now—it's winter time." He turned to her with a patronising look, and then added sharply: "But don't yer carry that knife in no sich way as that! 'Tisn't nowise safe, Miss. You'll sure be after cutting yourself."

Catherine had to turn her head away, for many and many a time he had chided her for this selfsame thing.

"Oh, that is all right—and thank you. Tell me," she said, in order to change the subject,—"is this the time to prune trees?"

"Yes, if they needs 'em, and he thinks he knows how."

"You must tell me your name."

"Eh! What? Why, James, Miss; as every one knows well enough. Born here." And he made towards another tree, as if further conversation were interdicted.

"Tell me about your work, James, and what you have in mind. I want to know. I am very fond of flowers, and expect you to have a very fine garden for me. Have you a sketch of how you mean to lay it out? I have some ideas of my own. And where do you get your seeds?"

He looked at her quizzically at first; then seemed to recognise her real interest, and was soon discoursing eagerly on the glories of his coming tulips, his hyacinths and jonquils. Beckoning her to follow, he led the way to the forcing house where he displayed his stock of seedlings for the summer beds. He unfolded also a map of the garden, describing his plans for rows and borders, and his scheme of planting. Both became completely absorbed: all distinction between mistress and servant, of age and youth, forgotten in their mutual zeal. Soon they were arguing hotly as to the kind of seed, the character and preparation of the soil, the times for planting, and the relation and effect of colours. At times the man showed himself nettled at her insistence, though on the whole well pleased—for now, there was to be some one on the place who could appreciate his work.

The time flew quickly; when Catherine found that she must get back to keep her appointment. It was therefore in some haste that she concluded her final di-

rections. These were given briefly, and with an assurance and finality of decision, to which he had long been unaccustomed, but which soon began to fall upon his ears with the rhythm of bygone days. Narrowly, and with wide open mouth he watched her every gesture and the flitting changes on her animated face, shading betimes with wrinkled hand his faded eyes, and contrary to his habit remaining silent and submissive.

"Well, I must go now," she finished. "We will take it up another time. But remember, James," and she smiled brightly, though raising her finger with emphatic gesture, "that I insist on Shirley poppies being in a bed by themselves; and also that the sweet peas be planted deep, very deep, and just as soon as the frost is out of the ground." And she passed through the door, leaving it wide open to the wintry air.

Slowly, on tip toe, he made for the door and shut it—as he had done so many times before; not slamming it in token of rebuke as had been his wont, but softly, gently now. By degrees the expression on his wrinkled face changed—first to incredulity, then to surprise and wonder, and at last to infinite delight; when, breathing a sigh of supreme content, he reverently rolled up his eyes in awe and thankfulness. Finally his mouth gradually broadened into a complacent and satisfied grin, and, after looking suspiciously all about him, he placed his finger on his lips, muttering scarce above his breath:

"Holy, ho-ly Moses!"

CHAPTER IV

JOHNNY

WHEN Catherine returned a surprise awaited her. The moment she entered the library she was greeted by the portrait of herself, mounted on an easel at the further end of the room. She was told that it had arrived some days since, and that Mr. Rheinlander had sent orders to have it set up immediately on her arrival, and subject to her approval. She was still inspecting it, when startled by a voice, saying:

"You want me to come in, don't you?"

A stocky little specimen of manhood stood just within the threshold, dressed in a scarlet toboggan coat and breeches, with leather leggins above the moccasined feet. One hand lay concealed in his pocket; the other held a white toque, which, with a polite bow, he had just removed from his head—while the sun pouring through the windows shone upon curly, golden locks, and lit up the healthful glow of ruddy cheeks beneath his large, innocent, clear blue eyes. Very straight he held himself, with an ingratiating smile upon his lips, and with the assured carriage of one who could not be denied.

His sudden appearance somewhat disconcerted Catherine, though her heart answered to him from the first.

"Yes, come in, little man," she said encouragingly. "Come in. And what do you want of me?"

"Dad says I'm no longer little. I'm a big boy. I'm 'most six."

"So I see; and a mighty fine boy too," laughed Catherine. "Come, sit by the fire and get warm."

The boy pulled himself into an easy chair, hitching his body backward until he reached its farthest recess, and began at once to devote his whole energies to the big piece of frosted cake Catherine handed him—though never removing his eyes from the donor of the unexpected feast, who, in turn, was intently watching him as he munched in silence.

"I can eat lots of cakes," he tried to say, finally—his mouth crammed full. And having finished what was in his hand, he cast an eager glance toward the plate nearby.

"No. I am afraid more might disagree with you," she told him. "And then they might not let you come again."

This did not seem directly to appeal to the boy. But soon he remarked, with a smile so sweet that his conquest was complete,

"I specs so. But I'll come again, right off."

After a pause, during which he still studied her carefully, she remarked:

"Now you will tell me your name, won't you—big boy?"

"I'm Johnny—just—Johnny. I'm a good boy—very good boy," he said insinuatingly.

"Yes, I believe it, Johnny, and I am going to like you very much."

"I'll bet I loves you—a lot." And at once, without further parley, he wriggled down and went over to where she was sitting; and, all uninvited, deposited himself in her lap, and putting his arms about her neck kissed her.

Catherine loved children. She had always cared for them—ever since the time they took the place of her dis-

carded dolls. But she had been close to none for years; and this first token, on her return, of genuine personal liking and approval, coming to her as it did, was never forgotten, and was the beginning of an abiding friendship between the two.

The boy perceiving tears in Catherine's eyes, immediately fumbled about his clothing, from whence he produced a grimy substance that had once been white. With this he tenderly mopped her face, striving to console her. Then he seemed suddenly to remember that he had a purpose in coming. So he slid down from her lap, carrying a bit of lace with him, and produced from his pocket an apology for an envelope, wet and sticky, and with a much used piece of chewing gum adhering to one corner. With practised skill he bit the latter off, and politely handed the missive to Catherine. It proved to be a letter from Nat, begging her to advance their appointment by an hour.

"Are you Mr. Gibson's son, Johnny?"

"Yes, I'm 'dad's boy.' "

"Johnny Gibson?"

"No, I'm Johnny 'Eng'soll Gibson," he corrected her.

She looked puzzled a moment and then drew back—a frown of displeasure flitting over her face. But it was only momentary, and she dismissed the thought that led to it, shrugging her shoulders. Her annoyance, however, did not escape the boy's notice.

"Daisy lady mustn't get cross."

Catherine pulled him closer to her. "Why do you call me 'Daisy lady'?" she asked.

"Jack says, he 'specs so."

"Jack is your brother?"

"Na!" he replied with utter disdain. "Jack's a big man! Bigger'n me." And throwing out his sturdy lit-

tle chest—"He's Johnny's bestest friend,—and Dad's. Jack's bully!"

The boy perceived that he was talking to the air, for Catherine had gone to the window, and her back was turned. Soon she felt a chubby dirty little fist fondling her hand as it hung by her side.

"Love me, Daisy?"

"God bless you, Johnny."

The hearts of both went out to each other as she raised him in her arms and accepted for all time to come the christening thus bestowed.

Catherine interviewed the nurse who accompanied the child, and then made him take off his coat and leggings and agree to stay and lunch with her,—his face beaming with delight—and directly proceeded to devote herself to his entertainment with that faculty and success which some women, and women alone, possess. She left him for a moment seated by the window doing puzzles, and returning found him completely absorbed and gazing within a small paper box which he held opened in his hand. Totally unconscious of her presence, he would first chuckle with glee, making wry faces at what he saw therein, and again, with uplifted finger admonish and revile its contents.

"Why, Johnny, what is the matter?" she inquired, much perplexed.

The boy hesitated, and quickly hiding the box from view looked solemnly up into Catherine's face. But what he read there seemed to reassure him.

"Honest Injun? You'll never tell, Daisy?" Without waiting for any reply, he displayed to her view a tooth packed in powdered sugar.

"Oh!" he cried, "I just love to see her ache all by herself!" At the same moment catching sight of a

sleigh, turning into the avenue from the road below, he jumped up with great haste, pointing in wild excitement, and shouting: "Dad and Jack! Jack and Dad!" and pulled her towards the door.

The other shut her teeth hard, turning first this way and then that—seeking some avenue of escape.

"No, I will face it. As well now as ever," she gasped. "Come, Johnny." And hand in hand, they left the room.

CHAPTER V

GREETING

"GOOD morning and 'a happy New Year,'" was Catherine's welcome on entering the library, all token of the disorder caused by her new friend's demonstrations having been removed.

A tall, large-framed man came forward.

"I am Mr. Gibson, Miss Rheinlander. And this is my friend, Mr. Ingersoll—your landlord."

She acknowledged their greeting, avoiding offering her hand.

"I believe that I have already had the honour of meeting Miss Rheinlander," Jack said, in an apologetic tone; though Catherine, imagining a suspicion of amusement beneath the contrite manner of his address, merely bowed.

"I see," Nat continued, "that my hopeful is already established. I trust he has not made himself a nuisance."

Johnny, who was clinging to Catherine's hand with every assertion of personal possession, not unmixed with some apprehension as to how his father would view his new friendship, exclaimed:

"She's Jack's 'Daisy,' Dad;" and leaving her, dug his clenched fists into his sides and planted himself squarely in front of Jack. "You mustn't sass Daisy more, Jack! You shan't. She and me are friends." He then returned very proudly to Catherine's side.

"I certainly shall not, Johnny; if I was ever so un-

fortunate as to appear to have transgressed," Jack replied, laughing. And turning to Catherine: "Miss Rheinlander will, I am sure, acquit me of any such intention. Johnny apparently overheard me telling his father of the unfortunate contretemps I had in the studio; and how, all too late, I discovered my unwitting impertinence. Indeed it was but just lately that I knew to whom I owed an apology. I see that the cause of my discomfiture has preceded me," he concluded, turning towards the portrait.

She muttered a few formal words of acknowledgment, whereupon, Nat's attention being diverted for the moment by the boy's endeavours to explain his regard for his new friend, and how he was going to stay and lunch with her, Jack took the opportunity to speak to Catherine of the time when he had first met Mr. Rheinlander, in Italy. This led to a reference to their Mediterranean cruise, and what a pleasure the friendly relations thus established had been both to his mother and himself.

"When people are brought so close together as we were, and for weeks at a time, they learn to know one another pretty well. We became great friends. The association left me with a very great regard for your father; a rare companion, always bright and cheerful, and certainly the most generous minded person I ever met. That gives me some slight hope that his daughter will forget my misadventure. It was very careless—and absurd."

"Certainly. It was never of the least consequence. But I am Mr. Rheinlander's adopted daughter."

"Yes, I know," he replied quickly. And then: "I am a constant visitor at Mr. Gibson's house, which makes us in a way neighbours. I hope we may be friends. That is, when you have really forgiven me," he

concluded with a smile, and holding out his hand.

But this Catherine did not appear to see. Unconsciously she had been momentarily carried away by the sound of a voice, every inflection of which touched a chord echoing back to this very room twelve years ago. There, too, was the same look, though more matured and forceful, of honest thought; the same candid, simplicity of purpose shining in his clear eyes. But with it, also, was the old, winning, boyish smile, which more than anything else had won her heart—and broken it. And the revulsion became so strong at the remembrance of the further degradation he had threatened, that she could have struck him. Yet she had her part to play, and though her eyes wore an angry look, she replied civilly:

"You lay too much stress on a small matter, Mr. Ingersoll. It was altogether too trifling to merit forgiveness. I shall always be pleased to see any of my neighbours who care to call."

At this moment Nat, who had been very closely observing her, came forward and asked if all of Mr. Rheinlander's directions had been satisfactorily complied with, and whether anything further could be done for their comfort. A feeling of uneasiness possessed him, which he could in no way translate.

Catherine thanked him heartily, and especially for the trouble he had been put to in getting the household together.

"You have been most kind, Mr. Gibson. Now I am going to impose upon you further by requesting permission to make some alterations." She led the way to the adjoining room, Nat following her. "I want to make this into a bed-room for myself, and attach a bath and

dressing room beyond, so that I may sleep on the ground floor."

"I am very sorry, but I fear we cannot consent without the owner's permission. Alterations were especially provided against in the lease."

She expressed her disappointment, but hoped that he would reconsider it; and this he agreed to do.

"Oh, I meant to inquire," she asked casually, on their return, "as to who does own the estate. Is there any objection to your applying to him, on my behalf?"

Nat glanced covertly at Jack,—who was now having what appeared to be a serious argument with the boy,—which did not escape Catherine's notice.

"You must ask Mr. Ingersoll. He is a trustee of the Marston properties, to which this place belongs," Nat replied. "I am merely his agent. Miss Marston, who inherited the Grange, is abroad and not expected to return to this country—certainly for the present." His expression was unreadable when he added, after a pause, "Do you wish me to forward a request to her, from you, personally?"

The query came to Catherine with a suddenness that for a moment left her speechless—it was so utterly ridiculous and unexpected.

"Why—no," and the words fell clumsily from her lips. "Or rather, do as you please about that—if you think it necessary."

"I hope, by the way, that you will be able to keep the head gardener. You probably could not do better."

Here she proved more ready with her answer.

"You mean the man James? Oh, yes, I certainly think so. I interviewed him this morning, and he informed me that he had always worked here. He should

be most invaluable to us. He appears to be quite a character."

"I believe," Nat ventured once more, "there are no other limitations in the lease, except that the safe—which, you know, is hidden from sight—should be left where it is, and the key remain in our possession."

"Well, you will do the best for me you can, I am sure," she remarked, displaying no further interest or curiosity.

"We must be going," said Nat very kindly, a little later, extending his hand. "My mother will call at once, —and you are quite sure you wish the boy to remain?"

But Johnny was upon her before she could reply, and with scant assistance had scrambled into her arms, burying his touselled head as had become his wont.

"Yes, she wants me a lot, Dad," he spluttered. Then disengaging himself, he rushed up to Jack, and grabbing him by the hand pulled him towards her.

"Jack forgives you," he cried, a trifle mixed.

So both laughed, and Catherine found herself obliged to shake hands as he bade her good-bye.

Jack was the first to speak, as the two men started on their homeward drive.

"Nat—in a way, that was the worst luck I ever had."

"What?" his friend exclaimed in astonishment, eyeing him sharply.

"Discovering our new tenant and the lady of the studio to be one and the same person. Great Scott, Nat, but she is difficult! She was very mad about it, at the time. I can see my work cut out for me to square accounts."

"One can't blame her overmuch; yet I would have given something to have seen the grand tableau."

"Yes, it was worth the admittance."

"But she's what might be called a bonnie looking lassie, Jack."

No answer forthcoming, he said by way of repetition:

"Don't you think so?"

"Yes—in a way."

The other glanced at him keenly, saying:

"You don't seem over enthusiastic."

"No? Well then, she has the most exquisite face I ever saw. Is that satisfactory? I mean it, too. I doubt if I could say as much about her temper or disposition; cold and brittle as steel—searching one's very depths with those glorious eyes of hers."

Nat laughed. "Well, perhaps she has some excuse in your case."

"Yes, I know—of course. Oh! it was a complete vaudeville in itself—except to the actors!"

"Jack," said his friend after awhile, and he looked with a great fondness at his companion; "the schemes of the Almighty are past all understanding. I never felt so strongly as I do now that there will some day come a rift in the clouds."

"What is the connection?"

"I have none to offer; sort of feel it in my bones."

"A poor argument, Nat, after all these years. But *cui bono*, old man? I really gave up every hope myself, of that tragedy righting itself, years ago. The best that could happen now would accomplish nothing more than relieving our minds."

Neither spoke for a while, when Jack continued gravely:

"Nat, it is a long while since we have mentioned her. If she lives, as I believe she does, and has ever been in

want, we must have discovered it. She would have applied either to you or to the Judge, as agreed to in her letter. If not in need, why should our paths cross again? What good would result? Time has separated us irrevocably. The child whom I cared for has disappeared. She has outgrown what drew me to her. I am an utter stranger to the development of these twelve years. By to-day, she has become an entirely different creature—soul, and mind, and body. Why should she ever care for me—now, more than when she left me? Certainly, what affection she has had was not very enduring at the best," he interpolated bitterly. "And what is equally to the point, why should I ever again care for her, at all? How could I love an utter stranger —to live with her as man and wife? What do I know of the life that has formed and moulded her into a woman?"

"You might love the new woman far better than the child?"

"Or possibly adore her daughter! No, but I still repeat my assurance that Kate is alive. You have sometimes wavered about it. Gradually, however, and more and more, the feeling has grown upon me that I wish never to meet her again, here or hereafter. I was married to that which no longer exists, nor can ever be resurrected. I am legally bound and fettered for life, of course. Now then, was there ever such an absurd anomaly as myself? I dearly loved a child. By some absurd mistake we got married. Later, what I loved vanished—died. If not in body, at least to me. Out of the ashes there gradually developed an uncanny attachment to—a myth we'll call it. This has strengthened with the years, till the boy's affection is supplanted by an intense longing for a fancied ideal, which he has no reason to

suppose exists, and which for him never could exist."

"Well?"

"The trouble is, I can't shake this off. It must be some psychological defect in my general make-up. It bars, of course, any other like interest—certainly a safety valve under the circumstances. But I hate to be stranded on a barren rock, without either the power or volition to swim ashore."

"And end by becoming either an arrant prig, or an ass, you mean?"

"Correctly said. I thank you kindly, old man. The quicker I return to my old self and become decently normal again, the better. But there! Let us discuss something else," and he changed to other topics.

"Jack," his companion remarked, as they were leaving the sleigh; "what do you think of letting her make the alterations she asked for? You heard what they were. She can agree to restore everything when the lease expires. Believe me, I am quite sure it is best."

"All right, if you like," Jack answered wearily. "Yes, it's a good way to begin. It is folly to continue harping on the old strain. As you know, too, I have reached the limit of what I can do. Either Kate is alive and refuses to return, or else she is unable to come back. We must thus always remain powerless either to assist or please her. Yes, let them make any changes they desire."

CHAPTER VI

AN OLD FRIEND

IT was with a light and happy heart, that one morning after three days of rain, Catherine awoke to greet the glad sunshine pouring into her room. And she was happy—happier than she had ever dreamt of being again. The full weight of her burden seemed to have fallen from her, never to be renewed; its place supplied by the springtime of a new existence, built on the foundation of the old. And this was to be her home—the old home! And nobody should take it from her! For this she had Mr. Rheinlander's word. He assured her, the last thing before they parted in New York, that she need have no uneasiness on that score, for wherever the title to the Grange might be, she should never be disturbed.

She longed to get out of doors, and drink in the crisp fresh air of that bright winter's day. So immediately after breakfast she started on her way and across the fields, to the village. At one point she stopped to take in the view. With the exception of a cleared space here and there, and occasionally a tall and dense thicket where once had stood a scattering of second growth, the landscape in the immediate neighbourhood of the Grange presented but few changes. There lay Judge Eggleston's house; and there was Nat's,—the latter much enlarged, and now surrounded by a formal stone fence. From the main road, which ran through the intervale, she could hear the familiar shouting of a teamster—the

crackings of his whip, as he urged on his horses, resounding like pistol shots in the cold, rarefied air. Not far distant, where the highway crossed the crest of a hill, the still figure of a man was silhouetted against the blue sky, his head turned in her direction. This gave her a restless feeling, she could not say why, and she turned her back to him and hurried on her course.

She was unaware, however, that the man remained where she had seen him, intently watching her—as he had done from the first moment, when, turning the corner of the house she struck boldly and unhesitatingly across the fields. His eye never left her as she traversed the hard crust of the upland, and thence onwards down the slope and through snow-laden woods to the valley. He marked her course, so undeviatingly true, her footsteps following with an unerring confidence the direction of the hidden path. He noted how she wended her way in and out with no uncertain tread; now vanishing in some copse or thicket, to once more reappear in open view; crossing the pasture lands and climbing the fences at those very points where the summer track would have led her—until finally she was lost to sight in the village street. Then he renewed his way, perplexity and irresolution written on his face, till with quickened strides he hastened to his home that lay below. Here he disappeared, to emerge again, this time with a companion by his side. Then, leaving the road, he headed towards the forest beyond.

As Catherine proceeded through the main street of the village, every passerby greeted her, in accordance with the traditional rural custom; and every man, woman and child she met was likewise aware of the name she went by. Notwithstanding this, she trod her way an absolute stranger in their midst though answer-

ing the salutation of many an old acquaintance, who knew her not. She longed to speak to some one, and made her opportunity by inquiring for the post office. It chanced to be an old woman to whom she applied; one she remembered well, and who used to be the foremost gossip of the neighbourhood. Catherine felt awkward and embarrassed. Not so the other, who, after directing her in answer to her request, pulled off her woolen glove and offered a bony hand in welcome.

"And this, I allow, must be one of the folks who is puttin' up at the Grange. I'm powerful glad to see you, Miss."

"Yes, I am Miss Rheinlander," Catherine told her—though "Van Winkle," trembled on her lips. "And may I ask your name?"

"Sure—Mrs. Beedle's mine. I lives up the road a bit; yonder by the big cedar, Miss. Mebbe you'll pass the time of day sometime when you goes by—and it ain't askin' more'n's right?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Beedle, I certainly shall. You see, I am a stranger in Dorset."

"Well, you mayn't be so awful long a-makin' of friends,—not if I be any jedge, Miss. Ah, many and many's the time the old Parson,—that's Mr. Marston, Miss—takes his cup of tea with me, and without no sugar neither."

"You remember him kindly, I see."

"And the same thing with 'em all in these parts. He was that cheerful and good; and his darter another like him—she as seems never to be comin' here no more. Oh, there was a sweet one! They did lots for such as I be, and the Lord himself knows what was a-comin' on us, if He hadn't sent another along to take their places."

"Yes? And who was that?"

"Wal, you see as how the Parson he did a heap of visitin' and prayin' round, and was ever a-givin' us poor folks help, and keepin' us off the County. And after he dies, and Miss Kate, as we calls her, leaves and goes to for'n parts, Mr. Ingersoll come back from the war and stays along with Mr. Gibson. He were kind o' sick and white like at first, and holds on thereabouts till he gets cured up, when he begins lookin' up the Parson's folks. Now every soul of 'em gets so much comin' their way every year—and sometimes more. Oh! he's as fine a gentleman as ever is, Miss, and has such a smart way of doin' things, and fixes us great; though he ain't no such as the Parson, nor no one couldn't be;" and she drew a hand across her sunken eyes.

They came to a halt as the woman finished, and on parting Catherine promised to come and see her. Then, after stopping for a moment at the post office, she started homeward by the same route she had come. She did not know what to think of the old woman's talk, and it greatly dismayed and vexed her. There surely must be some mistake, she argued. And if not, why then had he done this? He had been ill, too—fever or wounded, probably; and it flashed before her what the relief would have been had he been killed, and freed her from her bondage. She wondered if the thought were wicked. At all events the world would have been better off. This missionary work, if true, could have been prompted only by fear—the offspring of a belated conscience. What a consummate hypocrite the man was! It was likewise all so disappointing. One of her most cherished anticipations had been the hope of carrying on her father's work. And now she was, in a way, forestalled. She could act,

neither with this man, nor against him. Was she fated to have this scourge forever crossing her path and shadowing her life?

The spirit of freedom and independence that had buoyed her up when starting on her walk, were now entirely gone, and she felt depressed and lonely. Perhaps she needed more exercise, she determined. So striking off at right angles, she crossed the main road below the Gibson house, and thence up the hill that flanked it; not stopping until she reached its barren top, small in area and covered with rocks and stunted bushes. At the further extremity a huge boulder lay over and against a deep gorge, which, rock-bound with cliffs on either side, extended far away narrowing as it went into the recesses of the mountain forest. She made several attempts to climb to its top before succeeding, laughing at her futile attempts to accomplish what once gave her but trifling effort. From its summit she could see far up the narrow defile—dark, deep and ragged,—and trace beneath the thick skeletons of alderbrush and tangled undergrowth, the outlines of a summer brook, now still and lifeless in its frozen sleep. It had been a cherished rendezvous, and her eyes lit up with pleasure. Here in the olden days her trysts were only with Wolfine.

A marshy tableland lay at the furthest extremity of the gorge, the source of the brook, which, fed on its downward way by countless springs and shelving slopes, ran clear, and full, and cold throughout the hottest summer months. Here, when a girl, she had often fished for mountain trout, reaching the highest pools in the early morning; thence wading its meandering course, until broadening into shallower depths, the stream was hopelessly lost in the swamps below. Meanwhile Wolfine ranged the wild for hare or fox, at times her cry but

faintly heard far on the mountain side. Her own sport finished, it had been her habit to ascend the hill, and mounting this very boulder call her companion back by the signal known between them, which, reverberating through the gorge and echoing from cliff to cliff, summoned Wolfine from her coursing, though miles away.

Could she imitate that cry now, she wondered. At least she might try. It would make her feel young again. Several times she essayed the call in low tones. Then turning quickly about, she glanced behind her and to the right and left. Surely with no one in sight, and the place half a mile from the road, she need not be apprehensive. Pulling off her gloves, she raised both hands to her lips with palms turned outward and fingers closed, deeply drawing in her breath as she gave the long melancholy note of the Arctic owl, challenging its mate in the summer night.

Her face sparkled with delight, as she listened to the repetitions clashing through the ravine, and thence mellowing ever milder and softer till lost in the distant hills. She waited a few minutes, as formerly her custom, before making another attempt. This made her present pastime truer to the past, bringing the old life closer to her heart, and letting her imagination conceive that she was once more a care-free, happy child, the playmate of Wolfine.

Again she called; this time louder and with greater confidence, the echoes resounding more sharply through the stillness, and carrying further than before. She began to count them, as she used to do—when faintly but distinctly the last lingering notes were caught up and prolonged by a sound that froze the smile upon her lips. Rigid and motionless she stood, her head bent forward, with eyes strained and body crouching. Yet once more,

from far, far away, at the head of the gorge, came that long-drawn wail, vibrating through every fibre of her being. She clenched her hands, shaking her head as though to dispel some mental mockery and wondering whether she was becoming crazed.

But now the sound grew fuller, and oft repeated, and coming towards her. Once more she raised her hands and called—this time fearfully and in wondering doubt, her eyes glued on a far off opening in the brush that lined the rivulet's bed. Then, in a delirium of joy, she wildly shouted again and again; for now, the answer had changed to the continuous deep-throated baying of a mighty hound tearing on its way, hot on a trail lost and despaired of. And Catherine cheered and cried with all her might, as a long, whitish body glided between the openings, to speed like a flash of light directly beneath and spring beside her,—their gladsome meeting like the music of waters in a desert land.

Shortly after Catherine's return to the house, she received the following note:

"*My dear Miss Rheinlander:*

"On further consideration, I think that I may take upon myself the responsibility of your making the alterations you suggested—or for that matter any others that you desire. Of course I feel obliged to add, that this permission is conditioned on such restoration as Miss Marston shall request, at the expiration of your tenancy.

"As to the safe, we must retain the key and control; inasmuch as the contents—consisting of papers, letters, memoranda, etc.—although of no value in themselves, might be of incalculable concern to Miss Marston. Both Mr. Ingersoll and myself have thought they ought

to remain where she may at once have access to them on her return.

"I leave for New York to-morrow, where I shall be delighted to be of any service to you.

"With regards,

"Yours very truly,

"NATHANIEL L. GIBSON.

"Johnny sends you his love, and insists on your having one of his dogs, an Irish wolf hound. She once lived with the Marstons. Indeed, much of her time is still spent prowling about the Grange. She is somewhat old; but possibly you may like her. If not, do not hesitate to send her back."

CHAPTER VII

AN AGED SERVITOR

RAINS by night, alternating with cloudless skies by day, had advanced the season at least a fortnight, and the first week in April found the reluctant frost disappearing from the higher and more exposed surfaces appurtenant to the Grange. The forest's deep white carpet was becoming soft and wet. The hillsides had lost their coat of perfect purity. Dull rusted evergreens, and deciduous woodlands—stripped and bare—were thirsting for gentler showers and warmer suns, to nourish the sap in their wintried veins and give them power to leaf and blossom.

Catherine and Jack were returning from a long morning stroll, and stopped in the garden that the former might inspect the spring work, already under way. The two had seen a great deal of each other during the past few weeks—exploring the country, sometimes by sleigh or wagon, oftener afoot.

They had long since passed the first stages toward a better understanding; for Jack's candour and sincerity had impelled him—to her overwhelming astonishment—to tell in part the story of his early love, implying that he considered himself still bound by its obligations.

On that occasion they had made a treaty of peace, if not of friendship, and not since the compact was formed between them had Jack once transgressed its bounds, or given Catherine the slightest pretext for annoyance on that score. She had also in a measure disciplined the

current of her thoughts and feelings, and, happy in each other's company, both drifted with the tide. And thus it came to pass that, when together, the correlation of sympathies, ideas and tastes which had once existed between them, and never been lost, was again renewed, free from any untoward awkwardness or embarrassment. It was different, however, when alone. Then the man had to fight with fullest strength of purpose, lest his more impulsive thoughts, the fruition of which he recognised to be both futile and hopeless, get the better of him. The other, however, faced the situation squarely; dwelling on every new detail in earnest self-communion. From the very beginning, since their meeting in London, had come slowly but surely the ever strengthening conviction that to-day at least he was all that she had once believed him to be—only matured and of finer mould and, alas, possessing still greater personal attraction. Despite all that had gone before, she could not escape the fact that his presence thrilled and delighted her as none other ever would; and that she loved better than anything else, the assurance of having him by her side on the old familiar plane, and in the places dear to their childhood.

Slowly the knowledge came to her unwilling mind that her affection for him had never wholly died, but had in part lain dormant, sealed by the terrible indictment against him; and that now, when she was again brought into constant association with him, the fierceness of her anger was fast melting away.

As the two entered the garden they found Mr. Rheinlander already there, and with him Judge Eggleston, who had arrived the previous evening for a few days' visit at the Grange.

Johnny was also on hand, busily engaged in a destructive quest for worms amongst the already sprouting beds, ruthlessly delving in his search wherever fancy led him. At sight of Catherine, he at once presented her with the result of his labours; fetching the wriggling mass in his white sailor's hat, and begging her to hold them while he dug for more. Nat, who just then made his appearance, began to apologise, when the old gardener spoke up:

"In course he can do as he pleases, sir," he drawled, removing his hat and slowly scratching his chin. "Miss Rheinlander tells him he can dig—and he digs all right—all right. He's the real boss here. He axes her what he wants, and she says, 'yes, in course, Johnny, *dear*."

"Come, Johnny," Catherine instructed the boy, "you will try to be very careful and not spoil James's plants;" and she laid a restraining hand on the child, who, oblivious to what was being said, had renewed his depredations.

"No, Miss; not on my account," James broke in; "I allow as I give him his way myself, and as much as he likes. I'm powerful stuck on the kid—at times. Yes, and we'll be havin' 'nother circus comin' before long, I suspects. I sniffs it in the air—a regular picnic, sure. About the boy, Miss, he's right smart; nor he ain't begun yet awhile to think he knows it all better nor me. Though p'raps that mayn't count none," he added with emphasis.

"What do you mean by that?" came a trifle sharply from Mr. Rheinlander, who overheard the conversation. He had conceived a distinct liking for James,—which though fully returned, and with interest, was not always in evidence; and,—as on this occasion—he was

often irritated by the man's bluntness and lack of deference, especially towards Catherine.

"I ain't mor'n fair at no explaining, sir," he drawled in reply. "But seein' as how I been a-runnin' this here garding nigh on fifty year, I allows I kind of wants her to look summat like a hol dollar's worth."

"And it certainly does, James. I know it will be perfectly wonderful this summer," Catherine interrupted, glancing meaningly at Mr. Rheinlander.

"Well, have your own way—under Miss Rheinlander's supervision, of course. I make no pretense to any knowledge of such matters, myself. You must know by this time what best suits the soil and location; and," indicating the boy, "you can teach our little friend here to become a gardener himself. Eh, Johnny?"

Johnny gathered himself up. "I'm most's good now as Miss Kate were. Jim says so; didn't you, Jim?"

The man thus appealed to took his time, chuckling to himself before replying.

"Waal, I allows as Miss Kate was amazin' hard to teach; she was that set on havin' her own ways. And that ain't no partickler score agin her nuther, sir. She were a kind of born argyfier, you see. But I allers had mor'n an unnatural patience like. And she were that uncommon smart she learned powerful quick—a heap mor'n folks would have thought, a-hearing of her. I must say, if I says it myself, sir, when she leaves these parts she knows near all I knows how to tell her—and her own besides. But I wouldn't allow to having her get a notion I said it, nowise."

He paused, slyly studying the faces about him.

"But," he went on, "I ain't droppin' no dew about her comin' back. I hopes she never will—again."

"What is that you say?" said Jack, quickly and un-

consciously taking a step towards him. "You were once devoted to Miss Kate."

A dead silence prevailed; when the old man continued:

"You see it's this way, Mr. Jack. Beggin' your pardon, I was that terrible fond of Miss Kate I ain't forgive her goin' away—not the leastest—and beant like to nuther. I larned her all she knew, though she never thanks me none, nor says good-bye. So I lets Johnny there do what he likes. It kind of fetches back them times when she destructed everythin', and till I larned her right. But now," and he shook his head with a grimace, "she's like forgotten it all, and me the same; nor wouldn't care for the garding nor old James, no more."

Like a cunning old fox, knowing the lay of the land, and playing with the scattered pack, he amused himself at the others' expense.

"You were attached, then, to Miss Marston?"

He scratched his head, as if perplexed.

"I don't know nothing 'bout '*'tached,*' Mr. Rheinlander. I allow I loved her mighty smart, as all folks did." He considered a moment and then concluded wickedly, "Ask Mr. Jack about her, sir. They were allers a-kissin' and coddlin' each other up like a pair of kittens. They don't make none better'n she be—or was'n them times."

Jack did not dare to flinch or turn his face away, though conscious of Catherine's uneasy scrutiny.

Mr. Rheinlander was first to speak. "I am glad you had such a regard for her, my good man."

The latter may have imagined a slight patronising quality in the remark. It certainly did not appeal to him.

"That same don't need no 'goodness', sir! You'll hear nothin' else from the neighbours in these parts," he assured his employer.

"You were born on the place?"

"I disremembers all about that same time, myself, sir."

"But you have lived here all your life, my man, haven't you?"

"Not yet, sir."

Mr. Rheinlander abruptly turned about. But the others did not restrain their laughter, while the Judge burst into a roar.

Catherine came to the rescue.

"By the way, James, I have been meaning to ask you about that tree down by the gate. It looks half dead."

"And that's the truth, Miss, and it ain't never no use nor like to be. But Miss Kate planted it there herself. I daren't cut her down nohow—unless she tells me. That's where Mr. Jack and she buries that gol durn —I beg parding, Miss—I mean that beast—of—a—no good yaller durg. He never warn't no 'count, 'cept for spittin' and bitin'. And Lor, Miss, how he could just root up the garding; and me standin' by skeert to death of that un there!" and he pointed to Wolfine. "But Mr. Jack can give all the figgers on it, and how Miss Kate comes by him, and the murder did, and the mess it makes. The four of 'em was 'larmin' thick together, them days."

Jack was thus led to relate the advent and demise of the puppy, which he did without mentioning Craig, by name. They had all wandered down to where the tree stood, while Jack was telling his story. Wolfine, who was in advance, when she came to the spot, halted, her tail between her legs, rumbling some dog mutterings in her

throat, and turning first to Catherine and then to Jack. Both started to pat the dog's head, their hands meeting, to fly apart as quickly.

"What is troubling the dog, James?" asked Mr. Rheinlander.

"She's the only critter knows what's ailin' of her, sir. And she won't tell. I've axed her that same, a load of times the last ten year, when we was lonesome together. The most I makes of it, she's grievin' 'bout that yaller purp—sheddin' of tears like. Not as the whelp ever'd be wurth his durg-goned hide, sir."

"But that happened long, long ago."

"Long for jist plain ordinary folks, sir, I agree. Me and you now fergits sich right smart," and he chuckled audibly. "But Wolfine! Lor, sir, she don't fergit nothin'. She's a right knowin' animile." And he grunted with a supreme satisfaction, which his questioner let pass without further notice.

" 'Tain't only the purp, neither, that ails her, sir," he went on. "Miss Kate's desartin' her's what fixed her the most. Jimminy; but the old durg were powerful set on Miss Kate! When we got lonesome spells, wuss nor ornary, at not havin' her—that's Miss Kate—a pullin' ears and messin' things up, the old gal and me swapped paws—most times in dry weather, sir—watering our tears like onto the beds. Yes, sir;—though it ain't no use now whatsomever." And again he chuckled, looking at Catherine with deprecatory assurance.

The party were now at the foot of the lower terrace, which marked the boundary of the garden.

"You do not mean to tell me," inquired Mr. Rheinlander, pointing in amazement to the dog-house, which still retained its former position, "that Wolfine, un-

aided, actually dragged that weight along the ground?"

"Sure; and that warn't no 'count neither. She must first jerk her clear off the brick. She's nigh to chokin' of herself to death, sir."

"Indeed she did," Jack averred. "It was on this precise spot, right here, that we found her nearly strangled. Just over there, lay what remained of the puppy."

"Jack," and it was the Judge speaking, "I was always very sorry about that occurrence. I did not hear about it until long after it happened, when John Craig told me of the circumstances and his part in it, and how it had all transpired in his self-defense. I was glad to learn that he had written the full details to Mr. Marston, who, he said, exonerated him from any blame and begged him to forget it. I do not remember ever seeing anybody more cut up. It was a deplorable accident."

Catherine, separating from the others, wandered with Johnny to another part of the garden, while Jack, biting his lip hard, vouchsafed no reply. The others, every one of whom was aware of the truth, likewise held their peace out of respect to the Judge, whose friend they knew Craig to have been.

"It must have raised the mischief in your garden, James?" observed Nat.

"The mischief, you axes me? You may well say that, Mr. Gibson. I never hopes to see the likes no more. And then I ain't found Mr. Jack's fifty dollars neither," he added ruefully. "I never 'spects to. It sure's rotted now."

"He means a wallet I lost," Jack explained.

"A what?" demanded Mr. Rheinlander quickly.

"A pocket-book. You see, I heard the rumpus, and

hurried in by that gate over there with Miss Marston —who was with me—and had a little altercation, one might call it, with Mr. Craig. Later I missed the wallet, and searched for it amidst the débris, but could not unearth it. I finally offered James fifty dollars reward if he would find it for me."

"And you did not discover it?"

"No; and we both hunted that afternoon and for several hours the following morning, but with no success. It was not very large, and had probably been trodden down deep into the soft soil. Yet we dug up the whole place."

"And I allow the wurrums, for sartin, ate her up the same night! Oh, in course!" growled James. But the words and the tone of disbelief in which they were uttered were heard only by Nat, who was standing close beside him.

"Was it of much value?" Mr. Rheinlander asked.

"Not to any one but myself. It was a present; a fancy thing and very pretty—more of a card case than a purse. I never kept money in it."

"Probably his best love's picture instead! And worth fifty dollars! Whew! To think of it! I am afraid you are a sad case, Jack,—and to begin so young!" Nat jeered, his head turned towards his friend, while his look reached further and sought to read his host's thoughts.

Here Catherine rejoined them, and all proceeded towards the house, the two younger men bringing up the rear—the one absent-minded, the other irritated and annoyed.

"What amusement you suddenly find in hewing so close to the line, Nat, is beyond me," Jack whispered. "I fail to grasp why you wanted to be so coarse about

it, either. Such tomfoolery is an odd way to treat a secret. It might end in betraying it."

"Betray nothing, old man! What are you talking about? You never told me anything in regard to having lost a wallet. I was merely trying to get a rise out of you—and I got it too! Miss Rheinlander did not hear what I said. And what are you giving us, if she did? It doesn't hurt a man one bit for a woman to think he has a sentimental side—even if she is not the object of it. So long ago, too! You need not fret. It would not have jarred her a particle."

"Look here, Nat, I want—"

"Haven't time just now. Fact is I forgot something. Will join you later." And he abruptly turned about, and retraced his footsteps along the terrace till he came up with James. He planted himself squarely in front of the man, looking him straight in the face.

"Now, James, tell me exactly what you were driving at?"

The other started, and drew back without making any answer, trying to avoid Nat's eye.

"Come, out with it," Nat insisted. "You have got to explain. Trust me, I say."

In turn, the old man cautiously scrutinised his questioner.

"If you knows enough yourself to ax me, Mr. Gibson, you knows sure and sartin what I knows myself —and mebbe more to boot," was the reply. "But I'll bet a hog's tooth to a sheep's fist, sir, I knows it fust,— and I ain't come nigh blowin' of it away neither."

"And don't, James. You're a brick, man, and here's my hand on it."

"Well, I allow as you's a powerful grip on you, Mr. Gibson—to a rheumaticky, anyway; and it tuck me

clean to the guzzards," said the other, rubbing his released hand, and his eyes watering. "I likes bein' hitched up with you, sir. I'm that lonely running this job with myself alone—and since the fust day I sees her. Will yer tell me, please, what's a-doin'?"

"I don't exactly know, James—not yet. But keep a knot in your tongue, man—as before; and tighten it, too. Leave the rest to me."

"Bet your sweet life on it! And now I ain't no need to bother my old head on it, no more," and he sighed with relief.

"How about that purse? How hard did you hunt for it?"

"You'd ha' thought the devil aloose, sir. It ain't in this garden—nor never was. And when I'd sweat everything out of me a-lookin', I just kind of dreamed where the durned thing be; though I didn't lets on to Mr. Jack. 'Tweren't no use. And gee!—but he was that mad all over with the cuss. On 'count of the pup, sir."

"You will tell me, though?"

"Yes, I s'pose—seein' we be on the same hunt. You see, sir, we couldn't make to find it nowhere, me and Mr. Jack; and he's sure it was in his own pocket for sartin, when he takes off his coat a-runnin' here. So I puts two and two on top of each, and knows just where it nat'rally be took."

"Go on. Tell me everything."

"Well, it ain't so powerful much, I allows; but I was a-comin' this way out of the village, and just after the picnic was goin' on here, when I meets that Mr. Craig. And by gum, Mr. Gibson, but it was a sight how he was a-leggin' it—a-goin' that hell-to-split-like! And it be main hard to see his dirty mug, if he ain't

stooped down and—" Here he stopped short and whispered into the other's ear. "That's all I knows, and all I needs to. I disremembers ever a-seein' of him since that same time, sir; and I allow we ain't no use for him in this garding—not so folks might take notice of—Wolfine nor me."

"And I'm very glad you like Miss Rheinlander, James. "You understand?"

"She's just as good as both of 'em to once," he said with a shrewd look. "And I'm that obligated to you, sir."

CHAPTER VIII

A BROKEN HOME

THAT same evening, both Jack and Nat were invited to dine at the Grange to meet Judge Eggleston, and also a Mr. Browne who had come up to spend Sunday with him. Mr. Rheinlander had made no allusion to Catherine about what transpired in the garden after she had left the others. Whatever the story of the lost wallet may have revealed to him, he was more than willing that she should remain ignorant of it at this time. As a matter of fact he was offered no opportunity to discuss the subject if he had so desired.

As Catherine swept across the threshold into the library with the proud free carriage and easy high-bred grace which were always so natural to her slightest movement, Mr. Rheinlander and the Judge, who were both awaiting her, openly expressed an admiration which was still more apparent on the faces of the others, on their arrival a few moments later.

Until dinner was announced, her attention was mostly taken up by Nat, of whom she had seen very little since her return. But she was all the time fully conscious that his friend was watching her. And, indeed, Jack took in every detail of the bewitching figure, the shapeliness of the white, glistening arms, and the contour of her matchless throat and neck.

And thus it was throughout the evening; for although

they sat opposite one another, and the conversation was general, yet never for a passing second was either completely absent from the other's thought. Judge Eggleston took his hostess in, and at once gave her his entire attention. How well she remembered the thick, short-cropped hair, now nearly white; the round, clean shaven, florid face, and the steady mild blue eyes, which flashed or twinkled as the impulse moved him. She found him still the same kindly spirit, whose dictum at a long past Thanksgiving time had directed and controlled her life. She did not, however, permit morbid reflections to intrude themselves; but allowing her natural powers full scope, her brilliancy and beauty won the homage of all. To Jack, it seemed that he was forever finding some new charm, some latent attraction in this splendid creature with whom he had sought to establish a friendship, which, to make possible, was held to be platonic, and which he dared not to think of by any other name.

The dinner had well advanced, when the Judge was led to speak of the Provinces, and the sport he once had on its streams.

"And now I ought to be too old," he sighed, turning to Catherine, "to stand the flies; and too busy to spare the time. But Ingersoll has for years had one of the best chances in Canada—as I personally know. Shall we make up a party? You will be delighted to take us all in, won't you, Jack?"

"Yes—that is, I would," Jack agreed, laughing, "if I had not given up my river, long ago."

"You do not mean to tell me that you have parted with your New Brunswick rights? I would not have believed it possible! You took such pleasure in them. Where do you get your fishing, then?"

"In my dreams, mostly," he explained cheerfully.

"No; my Miramichi holdings became so valuable that I felt obliged to sell them. I had better—other use for the money."

A shadow of regretful sympathy passed over the Judge's countenance as he looked across the table at Jack, who flushed beneath the older man's inquisitive glance. The Judge, however, raised a brimful wine-glass to his lips, and bowing to his younger friend, drained its contents to the dregs in such silent homage as one man rarely accords another.

And Nat followed suit, muttering inaudibly, "Amen."

The act might well have passed unnoticed—but both Catherine and her father recalled it later.

"Who owns this property, now?" Mr. Rheinlander asked.

"I almost regret to confess, I do," said Mr. Browne. "You see, I offered too tempting a bait for Ingersoll to resist. But let me be your host instead. I should be perfectly delighted."

"I accept for all!" cried the Judge.

"Jack, what became of your head man—the one you had that last time I was with you? I took a great fancy to him; though he was the most taciturn chap I ever had anything to do with. Didn't he meet with some trouble or other?"

"Oh! you mean Pete Boudré. Yes, he has had his troubles with the rest of us."

"He was a wonderfully good man, in a canoe."

"The best possible. As an all-round woodsman, too, he had no superior. True, he was silent enough when amongst people, but once get him alone, and clear of the settlement, and he became very companionable."

"I used to love to watch him—he was so picturesque. Did you always take him with you, fishing?"

"No, I did more hunting with him than anything else," Jack answered. "I have missed him very much the last few years."

"Did he go to the bad?"

"Certainly not, that I ever heard of. But Browne has seen more of him than I,—especially lately. How is it, Browne?"

"His is a rather pathetic story—what I know of it," replied the latter. "He had a daughter, a splendid looking Zingali type of woman, and just as smart in the woods as many a man,—so her father told me—and often with him for weeks at a time on his hunting trips. He was devotedly attached to the girl, and very proud and boastful of her good looks and accomplishments. And then she must needs run away, which cut Pete up cruelly. They lived in Bathurst; but she was staying in the Miramichi country at the time, with some friends or relatives, so I understood. It seems that she never gave either of her parents a word of warning, or even wrote to them after she left. You have mentioned, Judge, what a hard, stolid face Pete had. Well, I have seen him once or twice break down completely, when her memory was strong upon him, and sob like a baby."

"But excuse me," he apologised, turning to Mr. Rheinlander. "This will hardly be entertaining for you, and is perhaps rather out of place here."

Catherine intercepted the side glance in her direction.

"Pray go on, Mr. Browne; I find it quite interesting;" and no one noticed the ghastly paleness of her face, partially concealed behind the rapid movements of her fan.

"There is very little left to tell, so far as my ac-

curate information goes. Their home, as I said, was near Bathurst, and Pete was often away on long jaunts —either guiding or after fur. The departure of Norna —that was her name—broke up their home, and for a time Pete was very ill. They had always held themselves rather above their neighbours, and the mother, certainly, was far better educated than most of her class. One parent suffered more from mortification, and the other through his affections."

"He knows who he is?" The question came from Mr. Rheinlander.

"No; not when I last saw him. It is generally supposed that Pete never mentions the matter to any one. But a camp fire in the still back-woods often opens the heart as nothing else will. Owing to our long friendship —I knew him some years before Ingersoll did—he had a great trust in me, and in my liking for him. I should be afraid to say how many nights we have slept together in the snow—back to back, to keep each other warm. His daughter's doings hit him mighty hard, poor chap. He has intimated to me more than once that he would kill the man on sight, when he discovered who he was. And I imagine that is just what he would do. Luckily he could never find out. The last time I saw Pete—about five years ago—was the outcome of a letter he wrote me seeking my help and advice, and there was nothing left for me to do but to go to Bathurst and see him. There I found a pretty row on between him and his wife. The whole gist of the difference lay in the fact that the daughter had been heard from, begging for forgiveness, and the paternal instinct proved stronger than the maternal, the mother being obdurate and angry, and Pete half crazed with excitement. I

finally managed to patch up the promise of a reconciliation, and then saw them both off to Montreal, where the daughter had given her address."

"And they all lived happily together, ever after?" Nat inquired.

"I hope so; but that was the last I ever heard of them. When I tried to get Pete the following summer, I found the family had left the country."

"The same old story," the Judge sighed.

"There are other details," Browne added, "which I probably have forgotten. But you have the substance;" and turning to Jack: "It all must have occurred, Ingersoll, at the very time you and I were loafing about Newcastle, trying to get the better of each other on those fishing rights,—and when you scored."

"Yes, I remember."

"Did the man ever confide in you about this?" And again the question came from Mr. Rheinlander; this time to Jack, who, struck by his host's insistence, as well as the inquisitorial tone that accompanied it, looked straighter at him, though appearing to hesitate before he made reply.

"Yes, on several occasions. Browne has the story pretty much as I understood it."

"Could you imagine what sort of a fellow it was?"

"No,—and Pete told me there was no clue whatever."

"Perhaps they have found out since."

"I doubt it."

"You have met—you knew the girl—of course?"

"No—I don't remember—that is, I must have met her—I suppose—but don't recall her. In those days, I generally sent word ahead for Pete to join me on the

north shore of the Gulf. If the daughter's character was built at all on the same lines as the father's, the chances are more than even that she has never betrayed the scamp."

"Did he marry her?"

"I don't know. How was that, Browne?"

"That did not precisely appear in the letter to her father," the other answered. "That was all he had to go by; but other evidence showed that there had been a marriage, at least in form. Pete always swore to it, however, that although she was the last person to have agreed to anything else, he yet believed her to have been grossly deceived—he fancying that she was probably fooled by a ceremony that was not a bona fide one. Otherwise there would be no apparent motive of her so long concealing the fact. The letter spoke also of disgrace, as well as trouble and separation."

"The whole affair is an outrage, and stirs me up prodigiously," cried the Judge, with strong feeling. "I would love to put a hand on the fellow myself—if only to teach one of his class a lesson;" and he clinched his hands tightly.

A strange and oppressive quiet pervaded the dining-room. Mr. Rheinlander was evidently worried and anxious, and avoiding looking towards Catherine. Nat was concentrating every effort of his mind and will, with the sense of something significant hovering near and struggling to approach—if one might only point the way. Jack himself became ill at ease and conscious of something having gone wrong, and tried to remember what he might have said or done amiss. Yet he could not exactly recall any remark of his that was out of place, and became irritated and embarrassed under the steady penetrating look with which his host regarded

him. As to his hostess, he did not dare look at her at all, so keenly assured was he of her disapprobation.

The silence got on his nerves, and he glanced inquiringly at his host, who, leaning towards him, whispered rather than spoke,—putting his hand on his shoulder:

"Don't worry, my boy."

The suppressed excitement and evident emotion with which this was said, and the intangible something that lay behind it added still greater bewilderment to his mind. He looked at Nat; but the latter was in a brown study, gazing into his plate with introspective eyes.

The Judge relieved the situation, saying as he addressed Browne:

"Your story is but one example, I have no doubt, of that very type of case which once made my life miserable, pervading my whole district, and being the immediate cause of my leaving the bench. Ingersoll understands all about this business, if any one does. I know that he has been of incalculable assistance to those endeavouring to break it up. No, do not try to deny it, Jack!—and we will tell you all about it later on, Philip. It is an eye-opener—and a check drawer, too, old boy—if you possess a real philanthropy. I will set Jack on you. In this behalf he is the best beggar I know—and a worker as well."

Here Catherine rose, and for the first time the others marked how white was her face. Leading the way from the dining-room, her step faltered on the threshold as she reeled back, faint and dizzy. A moment later she was clasping Jack for support, with his arm about her. Quickly she disengaged herself, and, her hands still resting on his chest, for several moments she eagerly devoured his face. Then, with a sigh that was more like

a sob, she gently took his arm, and with firmer tread proceeded towards the library.

"Do tell me what the matter is," he begged.

But she gave him no reply.

Everything, he reflected, when she did not at once answer, seemed out of joint, and to combine against him where she was concerned. He judged that she was determined on silence as her best answer, when feeling his arm pressed closer to her side, he instinctively stiffened his support as he bent towards her, expecting a return of her former faintness. But now there was a bright spot of colour high up on either dimpled cheek; and a light, transient and fitful as the awakening dawn of a glorious summer day, transfigured her face as she looked shyly up at him, her lips parted with an expression so soft and tender, and withal so pathetic, that it startled and mystified him.

They reached the library, the others following, where she assured them that the flowers and closeness of the atmosphere had been a little overpowering; which fully accounted for her indisposition, as well as the slight dizziness which still remained. And with this excuse she bade them good night.

While Nat was holding the attention of Mr. Rheinlander and the Judge at the further end of the room, she passed Jack, standing by the fire and waiting for her.

"You are not going back to New York to-morrow?" she asked.

"Yes, I must. I had hoped to stay longer but I can't arrange it."

"I am sorry."

"Then," he said with a radiant smile, "I am happy again—for I felt somehow as if I were out of favour. So

I am all right, and in no immediate danger of losing my friend—am I?"

She gave him both her hands, keeping him at arm's length so as better to read his face. The clouds of many years seemed breaking.

"No! No! and I thank God for it," she sobbed barely above her breath, momentarily forgetting herself. Then, dropping his hands, she abruptly left him.

CHAPTER IX

THE ADMINISTRATIVE LIE

AT this moment Jack heard Mr. Rheinlander calling to him, and crossing the room, he joined the others.

"I tell you what it is, Philip," the Judge was saying; "I do not know how much you may have kept in touch with the growth of our city life during the last twenty-five years, or whether you have any true conception of the vices that are degrading our municipalities. Beneath the veneer of our vaunted civilisation, however, and allied to our social system, one particular evil has long been breeding. It has now become fixed and settled. The fact that it exists at all, is, in my judgment, so pernicious and wantonly shameful, that no effort or means should be left untried to wipe it out, root and branch,—unless, of course, we prefer to allow our vitality as a people to be irretrievably impaired."

"This is what you had in mind at dinner, was it not?" the other suggested, as the Judge paused. "You allude, I presume, to the 'white slave traffic,' as the newspapers term it. It is revolting, I know; but the cases must be so few and far between, that with a little determined effort, there ought not to be any serious difficulty in getting rid of it."

"There you are!" and the Judge spoke with considerable heat. "A man of affairs, of brains, wealth, experience, and yet you speak of a firmly established social calamity as if it were merely sporadic! But after

all, I am not so very much surprised, for therein lie both the inception and the backbone of most criminal conditions—general laxity of appreciation and interest by the individual citizen, and therefore no rightful public indignation. Our higher society,—by which I mean especially those who are better educated and more responsible,—are steeped in ignorance. Perhaps people would wake up, if they could be made to realise how they, or theirs, may at any time run into this danger."

"I am very far from feeling the indifference you suggest," the other said drily. "But do not let me interrupt."

"What the evil is," the Judge went on, "the details of its origin and aims, its action and results, is too long and sickening a subject for us to discuss this evening. It is nothing new. Of late, however, the traffic has taken on such enormous proportions, has become so threatening to the public weal, and has incited to such a degree repeated and sensational newspaper exploitation, that it is hoped some effective laws may be enacted, and, what is equally important—enforced."

"Yes, I know; but how far does this trouble extend?"

"I cannot say. It is peculiar to no special community. On the contrary, it has become firmly rooted in more than one of our larger municipalities. It is fed mostly from foreign countries, and is partly carried on by associations organised for that purpose. These, notwithstanding they are generally at war with each other, are ever ready to unite against and defy their common enemy, the law." He stopped to relight his cigar, when Mr. Rheinlander remarked:

"I have known something about this, and heard it dis-

cussed. Yet this is the first intimation I have had of any such conditions as these. But what are our countrymen thinking of? Have our great cities become modern Babylons? Are time, education and prosperity improving or lowering our morality? What sort of proof is this of our boasted intelligence? Are our communities to become less and less secure as our capabilities widen? It is impossible that a system of lawless peonage should eventually prevail—not if sufficient interest were aroused."

"Interest!" the Judge snorted wrathfully. "Interest is not enough, though the present indifference is appalling. General indignation, a settled purpose, an organised attack and the means and ability to carry it through—that is what is demanded. Those best fitted for the work, shut their eyes; generally through ignorance, often from disbelief, and, more commonly, wilfully and selfishly and with an utter lack of all patriotism."

"How selfishly?"

"Because they suppose this slavery to be, without exception, confined to the depraved, ignorant, and poorer classes; and that the one victimized, in the first instance went astray more or less willingly."

"And is not this the truth in many cases?"

"Alas, yes—and probably in a very large majority of them. But that does not alter the fact that there are hosts of exceptions. People do not begin to understand how far this evil has sometimes penetrated, and that it has reached classes of society, where the victims—rescued through the power and authority that influence and money exert—do not wish to add to their misery by spreading their experiences broadcast to the world. Such examples are not uncommon. Our religious and church-going people,—as well

as our wealthy, smart, modern society,—raise an outcry at a relatively insignificant assault, and take every precaution against its recurrence. On the other hand, they are either grossly and culpably ignorant, or else wilfully allow a condition of things to exist where an innocent woman of any condition of life may be kidnapped on the open thoroughfare, eventually sold into a slavery worse than death, the perpetrators allowed to go free, and the 'System' remain practically as dominant as before. I know of several such instances which have come under my personal observation. Trusts, monopolies, railroads, graft in places high and low, and all the hydra-headed scandals—ofttimes myths—which, under the battle-cry of 'Reform,' arouse the interest of our philanthropists and legislators, as well as pander to the tempers and pockets of the muck-rackers and yellow journalists, to the love of the sensational and the glare of the limelight—are of precious little account in comparison with such a noxious plague as this."

"Yet the genesis of this vice really dates from time immemorial," Mr. Rheinlander interrupted.

"That is undoubtedly true," resumed the Judge with vehemence; "but that modern times should permit it to spread and propagate, to invest and threaten our homes, demoralising our citizenship and impairing our social security, is a crying disgrace. Prey of such a character is not sought for so much among the moneyed classes. The opportunity is less, and the hunt too dangerous. Their surroundings generally forbid it, and they are better able to take care of themselves. It is the respectable poorer people, of narrow means; the tradesman, artisan, mechanic and the like, who mostly have my sympathy. Likewise those parents struggling to bring up their offspring in the fear of God and man,

while their circumstances force them to domicile in the centres of contamination, where their children remain in a great measure unprotected while they themselves are away at work."

"And the community that tolerates such a state of things calls for the greatest charity of all," exclaimed Mr. Rheinlander. "But the responsibility? Surely there must be a law that reaches these vermin!"

"The responsibility is on you and me; on every man and woman, poor and rich alike, who lays claim to American citizenship, and who helps to create the lawmakers and the executive. Laws! Of what avail are laws if there is neither purpose nor hope of enforcing them; when, in their very enactment, there exists a wilful intent merely to lull society into a false sense of security?"

"And it is this status of the law which I suppose has particularly been troubling you?"

"Just so. There are certain supports which a presiding justice—unless he lives in a barbarous country—has a right to expect and depend upon; and foremost among them is the sanctity of the law. I mean that when a statutory law is definitely and succinctly stated, there should exist, at the time of its enactment, a full and honest intention to have its provisions enforced. Also that its sponsors, and the lawmakers who promulgate it, should not have up their sleeves the deceitful intent of a more liberal enforcement, the resultant operation of which has been well stigmatised as the 'administrative lie.' When a law is dishonestly conceived, its administration usually follows on the same lines. It eventuates that the court is made a mere puppet." And the Judge went striding up and down the room, gesticulating in his wrath.

"Laws! we have plenty of them," he continued. "Too many, on the general issue. Too few, on this special branch of it. Public opinion compels the enactment of a law, and it becomes enrolled on the statute books. And yet the same public—generally through the manipulation of the 'System'—often demands that a law, after it is once made, shall not be carried out."

"Why? I fail to understand."

"Notably because its enforcement would upset the conditions to which people, particularly those in authority, have adapted themselves. In short, our whole manner of dealing with social evils is rank hypocrisy. And the voters themselves are to blame. They have the power to wipe this 'System' off the face of the earth, but lack the courage and energy to do so. What will happen through the medium and example of federal legislation, remains to be seen. But the true requisite is, that the present and ultimate purpose of those seeking legislation shall be honest. There can be no effective statesmanship, no reliable authority, when moulded by the exigencies of personal ambition, or influenced by the thought of a dollar."

"Yet there are some State laws on this point, however imperfect. We also have the machinery to enforce them."

"Yes, we have both. But the one is poor and insufficient, and the other not always to be depended upon. The political graft, that permeates many of our larger cities, is the backbone of the whole difficulty. It is discouraging enough—when a case manages somehow to escape the immediate control of the 'System'—for the court to be obliged to grapple with a poorly drafted law; but it is practically impossible rightly to admin-

ister justice, when the court can rely neither on jury nor witnesses."

"But where do the police come in? Is it not their primal duty to enforce the law?"

"Certainly; yet in given localities, and in this line of cases particularly, the police have become a law unto themselves. They are subservient to no master but the 'System.' They are able to adjust the law—in its application—to each individual case, and for pay. Thus a quasi partnership is created between the authorities and the criminal. Whenever the interest of the former lies in the breaking and not the upholding of the law, and both are corrupt, then they combine together. Given a dishonest police captain—and every sergeant, roundsman, patrolman and minor officer on his beat must follow suit—or be fired."

"Then let such a one complain to a higher authority."

The Judge laughed outright. "Good! and the complainant lose his job on a faked charge, brought before the very 'System' which has directly, or indirectly, benefitted by the protective graft. Time and again captains of police, tried on testimony that was incontrovertible, have been acquitted, and afterward actually promoted! Shifting to another beat, merely means fresh fees for illicit protection. My duties were to handle cases when brought before the court—but Ingersoll here has a more practical experience of the 'System's' workings."

Jack shook his head. "Yes, it is a rotten state of things. Many reform movements are apt to be conducive to as much harm as good."

"In what way?"

"Why, when the demand for a given reform cannot be further denied, its passage is generally due to the efforts

of the very organisation at which it is aimed, which thereby acquires both credit for a meritorious act and at the same time opportunities for further graft and blackmail," and the Judge has sketched the outlines pretty accurately."

"It would appear incredible!" sighed Mr. Rheinlander. "But why do you take it so personally to heart?" he asked, turning to his friend.

"Because my judicial district was honeycombed, and virtually controlled by the political forces that chiefly regulate this state of affairs. I resigned in consequence. I wouldn't be made a tool of."

"I fail to see how you were involved."

"Only by having always run on their party ticket, which—without undue vanity—has probably helped its moral average," he answered ironically. "Also, because I have regularly subscribed such pecuniary aid as was demanded of me at the time of the city elections. They undoubtedly considered me a complacent fool. Yes, I guess that is about the size of it." He was running on, for the theme aroused him, when he stopped, adding as if speaking to himself, "Yes, I must see Craig immediately."

"Really?" and it was Nat who spoke.

"Yes, and why not? I used always, practically, to depend on him in such matters. He has been in Europe for some years, and has only lately returned to this country."

"It is your circus, not mine, sir," rejoined Nat, bluntly.

The Judge flushed. But nowadays, there was vastly more deference in his attitude towards Nat than when the latter affixed his first signature as Justice of the Peace. The then newly fledged attorney had now

become a marked man, of distinguished abilities and growing reputation at the bar.

"He has never been anything but perfectly square with me, brother Gibson. Besides, I have always liked him personally. He is the best of company."

"I hope so, Judge. Let me know if he ever turns out not to be all you claim for him." The suspicion of a sneer flitted over his unreadable face while adding, half aloud: "The Tammany bum!"

"But Philip"—said the Judge, rising, "it is late. You will never want me here again. Besides my man must have been waiting a long time. Come on, Browne." And soon both were on their way home.

CHAPTER X

TWO FRIENDS

THE younger men had returned to the Gibson house, and with pipes lighted were discussing their night caps before going to bed. Jack found himself very cheerful and happy, though logically why, he would have found it difficult to say. From time to time he was conscious of his friend's earnest scrutiny.

"Well, let us have it, Nat."

"Oh, I was thinking that while I've had to work nights at the office—getting but an occasional week's end—my partner's job seems to enable him to languish in a fair lady's smiles."

Jack flushed hotly under his friend's gaze and threw up his hands.

"I give it up, Nat—the whole business! I have come to that state of mind that I don't know whether I am 'afoot' or 'ahorseback.' Every time I see Miss Rheinlander I get a surprise party."

"And here's to more coming!" toasted Nat, emptying the glass by his side. "Curious, isn't it, Jack?" he continued, a hint of irony in his voice. "Just think of it! Conversation at dinner table very drastic for polite company, and deuced unpleasant for ladies; moral as well as floral atmosphere bad—very bad. Besides, this Lothario was challenging his inamorata's confidence and trust by nonchalantly admitting, and to her very face, that he was himself hovering about the premises when the girl vamoosed. Finally the lady contingent can't

stand it another moment. She totters against eligible young man—who escorts her from the room. Tableau!"

"What fool nonsense, Nat! You are the—"

"To be sure—" was the answer.

"Really, Nat. What is it you're pumping me about?"

"Well, I once imagined that all this talk about platonic friendship was mere twaddle. Evidently, I have been mistaken."

Jack, though long accustomed to his friend's ways, lost all patience.

"Nat, you are unbearable; an absolute—"

"Yes, yes, I agree in advance—but don't say it and wreck my feelings," the other laughed. "It is not a bit necessary. I am with you up to the handle, old sport. Go ahead. Have a good time. Play the game. What if you do get a little scorched? It's all in the running."

At first Jack vouchsafed no reply. "Nat," he questioned at last, looking at his friend with a doubtful smile, "what in the devil do you want me to say?" And then:

"To tell the truth, if you must know, I adore her. Her very presence carries me off my feet."

Nat came and stood directly in front of him, and his long proven, sympathetic brotherly affection underlay his words:

"No. Jack, I am more than glad for what you have told me. I suspected something of this. But I wanted you to admit it. Now, will you take the advice of your oldest, best friend: one, whose mortification and remorse for his share in your broken life, has been far greater than you ever knew?"

"Go on, Nat."

"In the first place, tell Miss Rheinlander that you are married, and—"

"I can't do that. You wouldn't want me to. It is another's secret rather than mine. I told her, however, long ago, that I could never marry."

The other did not evince any surprise at this statement, saying:

"Yes? That is better still. What reason did you give?"

"None—exactly. How could I? I merely said that my antecedents forbade it."

"Was that all?"

"Well, I gave her to understand something about a past memory, an affair, and all that, you know—and—"

"At which she immediately flared up and gave you—woman's way—either directly or by implication, to understand that she was fully competent to look after herself," Nat cried, grinning with delight. "Isn't that true, Jack?"

"Precisely that. She assured me as well, that my other experience was very likely my own fault."

"To which you doubtless felt obliged to agree—at the same time stating ignorance as to which of your many etc., etc., was most to blame?"

"Something of the sort, I believe. Later, however, we established ourselves on a friendly basis; or rather, she accepted that position in a tentative sort of way."

"Friendship be blowed, Jack! Will you allow a suggestion from me?"

"I am listening."

"You have placed yourself square. Now, since you really care about her—just lay yourself out, and make the running for all you're worth. Such a prize as that is not—"

"But you do not understand our relations, at all. Be-

sides, you seem to forget that what you suggest could only end in—"

"I forget nothing," the other snapped with assurance. "I believe—I know—my judgment is worth forty of yours in this matter."

He spoke so decisively, that Jack, though much astonished, was half convinced.

"Do what I say. Do it whether you deem it useless or not. It can certainly do no harm. Will you?"

"Well, that would be easy to promise. The difficulty is, that what you advise is much in the same line with what I have been doing for weeks. I do not see how I could improve on it."

"Which to you, in your blindness, makes your position desperate. To my way of thinking it is exactly the reverse. At all events, do nothing to lose, and everything to strengthen first and foremost, her respect for you, to-day—however naughty she may believe you to have been in the past. Remember! That is your pivotal play."

He rose, and after deliberately knocking the ashes from his pipe, concluded:

"The testimony has unequivocally established one thing, in any event, old man—that the petitioner has shown himself at least a passably honourable man, and is much attached to the respondent, if only in a brotherly way. Therefore, the other side being absent, the court adjourns *sine die* to await further developments. Well, I must go to bed."

"Yes, and I'll follow suit. It is later than I thought. I suppose the Judge comes back with us."

"Probably; but I take a later train, and the other way."

"Rheinlander's business?"

"Everything's Rheinlander's business, now-a-days. The firm will become demoralised. Put that down as the cause of my chaffing you. Good-night, Jack. Sleep tight."

CHAPTER XI

REALISATION

WHEN the others were gone, Catherine in her wrapper came into the library. For some minutes she stood motionless before the fire, one slippered foot resting on the low fender, engrossed with her own thoughts. So absorbed did she become gazing into the flickering firelight, that she failed to perceive Mr. Rheinlander had entered the room, until he was close beside her.

"Do not move, Catherine," he requested, drawing up a chair. "You are better, I hope."

"Oh, I am all right now, thanks. The room was so stuffy—and all the rest of it. It was all too horrible!"

"I understand. But tell me—where were you this morning? You were away a long time. You are not overdoing it, dear?"

"I took a long walk, Father."

"You and the dog, I suppose."

"No, he accompanied us, also." Then, raising her voice, while at the same time feverishly gripping his arm:

"Do you not now realise that there never was a doubt. Years ago he told me, as you will remember, that he had never even seen Norna, and how at the time he was in Northern Canada on a fishing trip. Yet, this very evening, he admitted being at Newcastle."

Mr. Rheinlander did not argue the question with her. Moreover, he deemed it wisest not to allude to what the

later conversation at dinner had disclosed. Despite the discrepancy of years, there prevailed an unusual companionship between the two. Shortly, he leaned over, stroking her hair as he spoke. "Do not think, dear, that I have failed to see or appreciate what a prolonged, terrible trial it must have been to you, to bring about this *modus vivendi* you have established with Ingersoll."

"It can make no difference, Father," she said with resignation. "Not in the end."

"Catherine, you know it was understood between us, that I should wait for the results of my investigations, before further harrowing you on the subject. I might just as well tell you now, that every means of research which time, labour and money could bring to bear, has been made. The conditions in the region where information had to be sought, shift so from year to year, that in twelve years all trace has been lost; or else circumstances, strangely ill-fated and unusual, have specially intervened in this case so as to blot out all clue to Norna's former association with Ingersoll in New York. Neither have I been able to ascertain where she is at present. Her father's whereabouts, as you heard at dinner, are not known. Her mother died five or six years ago. Left alone, Norna immediately took up her old occupation of nurse. That I know. But I have been unsuccessful in getting her address, or discovering any further trace of her.

"For the rest, the cumulative reports sent me are on the whole negligible. You have already seen a copy of your father's will. You know Ingersoll's interest thereunder. You understand that the Grange was sold in accordance with the provisions of the will. The sale was recorded, but I believe the vendee's name to be a fictitious one. I admit that this demands explanation.

It doesn't look right. Moreover, beyond the inventory of the estate, no further accounting, such as the law requires, has been filed in the Probate Court. Of course I am not prepared to tackle these issues, at present. But there is much I don't understand. Moreover, if the inventory is correct, the property supports a large income. What has become of this? Some of it, though relatively only a small slice, has presumably been expended towards searching for you. I don't know whether a court of chancery would stand for that, or not. But what of the remainder?

"Again. Besides the fact that the Newcastle Registry of marriages corroborates Norna's statement as to Ingersoll being her husband, he was also a passenger, as the official list shows, by the very steamer on which you expected him, and which you met on its arrival. I am free to admit that this is only circumstantial evidence; but its implication is very strong."

He stopped for a moment, and then said, his manner calculated and impressive:

"And yet in spite of everything, I still reiterate that I do not at heart believe him guilty. No,"—checking her impulse to interrupt—"we won't go into that now. Yet to prove himself innocent, and to my satisfaction, he must establish not only an alibi, but go further, and show that some one else married Norna, and ratify the fact by producing the man's name. I shall be contented with nothing less."

Catherine made no reply—hanging her head.

"So much on the one hand," he continued. "On the other, his life as positively shown, presents so far back as I have been able to uncover it, a perfectly clean slate. Whatever he may once have been, I am quite confident that he is an honest man to-day."

"I believe it! Oh, I feel, I know it!" she cried, and then broke down, sobbing in great bitterness.

Mr. Rheinlander was not entirely at a loss to comprehend what moved her, but, watching her closely, let the outbreak take its course. Suddenly, springing to her feet, she threw up her arms with a gesture of despair.

"Father you may despise me for an utter weakling if you will. I cannot help it. I don't want to help it. It comes to me more and more, what might have been—Oh, what might have been! I now realise what I have lost, and how much I once loved him—a love far greater than I then knew. I was not old enough to gauge its depths, nor understand. Then came the revelation of an entirely different man—too terrible, too horrible and loathsome! The sweetheart was lost, transformed into a degenerate. By the sheer course of events, I was made his victim. He betrayed; he degraded me."

Her voice sank low and tense as she proceeded, dragging out her scarcely audible words.

"No one but myself can begin to understand how hard it was, at first, to tolerate his presence here. I did it purely from a sense of duty, and because you wished it. By slow degrees and against my will, it has been borne in upon me, that, whatever he may have been, the present man is true, sincere and upright; that in all his thoughts and feelings he is nobler, and as far my superior, as kindly charity is above cherished hate; as strength of purpose is greater than weakness." She paused a moment, catching her breath. Then, raising her voice, she continued:

"During the last few weeks I have struggled with this whole question—by day and by night. When he married me, though living an evil life, he was little more than a boy. He was handsome, attractive, and manly.

He was also well-to-do, legally free, and of good position. Whether for well doing or folly, life was before him. On the other hand—what, who, was his wife? The simplest child; homely, country bred, ignorant of the world. Think of it, Father! It was accident, not he, that did the initial wrong. What did this boy do? What course did he pursue to save my name from vulgar gossip? What he did was to stand by his absent wife like the man he was. Oh, so kindly!"

Pressing her breast with one hand, with the other she grasped the mantel for support.

"It was long—long before, in my egoism, I could bring myself to admit the possibility of his no longer being the creature I had thought him. It has taken months to teach me that his aspirations, standards and intent are lofty and true; that such affection as he once had for the unattractive girl, forced upon him as wife, has—most inconceivable of possibilities—become a dominant influence in his life. Influence, did I say? Why the man adores, yes, reverently worships the memory of his old playmate, his child wife!"

"But,"—and she paused, shivering, her face grey and set: "he hates the very thought of the woman that child became, the wife he believes to have wantonly betrayed him. What then is left of my pride, when the truth may not be denied? It is he, he, who, in spite of his own sin, will never forgive me. Do you grasp what this all means? He despises the derelict woman who is his wife—and yet, but for the child, who I once was, and his allegiance to her, he would to-day worship at my feet."

CHAPTER XII

THE BLIZZARD

THE backbone of the winter was broken—so everybody said—and the season appeared exceptionally advanced. Yet the snow had not entirely disappeared from the uplands, and still covered the ground in the sun-shaded forests; lying in deep, unyielding drifts amidst the ravines and narrow gorges.

"You will be careful," said Mr. Rheinlander, addressing Catherine from across the lunch table. "Promise me. The roads are in pretty fair condition, I know, and I am told uncommonly free of frost for this time of the year. You may meet with wet, soggy stretches, however, especially where the sun has less access. Had you not better take a man along with you, in case of a blowout, or something?"

"Why no; it would spoil half the fun. The tires are practically bran new, and I will see the chains are on, against the muddy places. Besides, I am not going so very far. It's nearly a year since I was at the wheel, and I am just wild to try the new car."

"Well then, go ahead. But you won't drive too fast?"

"I'll try not to. No, dear, seriously, I'll be particularly careful."

"Good!" he agreed; adding as he rose from the table, "but I must hurry. I'm off for Portland on business. Probably I shall return by the afternoon express. Saturday—isn't it? I dare say Ingersoll will be on the

same train. Shall we have him to dinner, to-morrow?"

"He won't be here, Father. He told me he could not arrange to get away for this Saturday, nor Mr. Gibson either."

"All right. But don't worry if I am delayed over, and have to come in the morning."

"You'll telephone?"

"Yes, and good-bye."

Half an hour later Catherine's car was brought to the house. She had left Johnny—who, having had his early dinner, was following his constant and welcome habit of coming to call and then sitting with the Rheinlanders during their lunch—in order to make herself ready for the drive, and found him, on her return, looking gloomily out of the window at the car standing before the door. Something lacking in the boy's usually so demonstrative manner, as she recalled their parting, caused her to hesitate when she reached the foot of the steps, and she came back. He was standing on the same spot she had left him, very disconsolate and muttering to himself.

"What in the world is the matter, little man?"

He refused to answer, at first, turning away his head.

"Tell me, dear, what's troubling you?"

"I was just a-thinking," he said finally, his face very sober and reproachful.

"Oh, Daisy, I thinks what a naughty, awful liar you be"—and he shook his curly head gravely, with mixed reproach and sorrow.

"Johnny! Boy! You mustn't talk that way! Come here, and tell me all about it."

"You promised me, Daisy. Yes, you did—ever since Christmas—to take me too;" and it was evident he was struggling hard not to cry.

"And of course I mean to—lots of times."

"No, no! You promised to just as soon as you can—the first time you go. Yes you did, Daisy;" and the tears would come, despite the restraining knuckles digging in his eyes.

Catherine hesitated a moment.

"And why not," she said to herself, "if he gets in behind? Come along then, boy; only you must ride on the back seat. Wolfine goes in front. I can't attend to you there, when driving. Wolfine can manage for herself."

The boy gave a whoop of delight, and his thanks and prayers for forgiveness became one jumble of penitence and joy. She told the nurse not to await their return as her charge would pass the night at the Grange, and before long he was seated in the tonneau well wrapped up and protected for the drive, with still another heavy robe thrown in; while Catherine, creeping slowly down the steep Avenue, could hear his unrestrained babble of rapturous wonderment.

They had reached the level, and were turning into the highway, when they met James, and Catherine stopped to give an order.

"A beautiful day, James," she remarked when again about to start.

"Things ain't allers what they looks, Miss," he returned, touching his hat as his eyes wandered across the intervale to where, in the south, a dull white haze brooded over the hemmed in horizon, shutting out the more distant hills. "Weather's like some folks—allers cranky."

"What is upsetting you now, James?"

"Ain't nothin' much bothers me none—long's you stays around, Miss," he replied shortly, but with much

the same manner of devoted fealty that a rough dog shows to his master. "I ain't nothin' to cry 'bout, not me; nor bean't no weather prophesier neither. Axing your parding, Miss, yer mayn't be a-goin' far, I reckons —nor 'low the thing to bolt with yer, I hopes."

"No! not if I can stop it—and with Mr. Johnny aboard. You don't think it's going to rain, do you?"

The old man once more gazed tentatively down the valley.

"No—no rain—I'm a guessin'. There's oft wusser things nor just plain rain, in these parts;" and he shook his head doubtfully. "Whatsomever is a coming, will wait on yer mebbe, and mebbe not. Most things does, Miss;" and turning off, he went on his way.

"Queer old man—ain't he?" apostrophised the boy.

"But nice, Johnny."

"You bet! Dad says he'd wash better'n gold."

Here Catherine charged him not to talk and distract her attention, and soon they were speeding along, headed for the bridge some five miles below. She had planned to leave the left bank of the river at that point, and crossing over, join the road on the opposite side, and thence proceed up-stream to the house of an invalid widow, whom she intended to visit. Later, she meant to continue in the same direction, coming back by the way of Dorset Village, and thus complete the circuit—a distance, all told, of about eighteen miles. The boy sat tense and quiet, with mouth wide open, and taking it all in as they flew along; not needing further admonition to keep still, so completely was he engrossed by this new experience.

It was not long before they had passed the old logging road which led to the rapids. Three miles further they were rattling over the bridge, beneath which the stream,

now a swollen torrent from the spring freshets, churned and boiled in a swirl of reddish, turbid waters.

Turning to the right, Catherine headed the car to the highway running parallel to that by which they had come, and so on up-stream—following its sinuous course through an open level country where the road-bed was hard and dry, till they arrived at their destination.

Here they remained much longer than was originally planned, Johnny amusing himself by a minute inspection of the premises indoors and out, till Catherine finally rose to go.

Before they had traversed much over a mile, the speed had to be changed to meet a long steep ascent, facing them. Also from the foot of this hill the road-bed became narrower, rough and muddy, and the travelled track less defined. Half way up the incline they entered a belt of green woods, where the densely foliaged balsams shut out the sun, leaving a ribbon of melting snow and ice to right and left. Catherine was finding her skill and strength taxed to the umost to keep in the centre of the road and avoid the treacherous incline on either side, when, just as they arrived at the summit, and in despite of all she could do, the car suddenly slipping from her control skidded, landed in a ditch, and came noisily to a standstill. Quickly she put on the brakes, and shutting off the power, dismounted. Both of the rear wheels were buried to the hubs in a spring hole, and the car was hopelessly stalled until she could procure assistance. And now for the first time, she became suspicious of the increasing darkness, and realised that the dull light was attributable less to the thick wood, as she had supposed, than to the low hanging clouds, brooding overhead. She looked at her watch,

and uttered an exclamation of dismay. At that instant, an ominous rustling of the forest, rapidly increasing to a violent squall, and immediately followed by a whirl of blinding snow, first surprised, and then terrified her. She had little to fear on her own account, though the gale rapidly increased, and the wind reached such a momentum that it seemed as if she must be lifted off her feet. Such rapid changes from fair weather to foul, she knew to be not uncommon among those hills. She had experienced them before, though never such a one as this. Alone, she considered she might have beaten a retreat to the house from whence she had just come, not over two or three miles; or if that were impossible, cower within the shelter of the forest, or the machine, until the storm lulled. Surely such a velocity of driving, blinding snow, could not endure very long. But it was a different matter for the boy. He was much too heavy for her to attempt to carry him back so long a distance, and the nearest shelter straight ahead, she knew to be further still. She searched the car, and was thankful to find two rubber shirts. One of these she drew over the boy, and then bundled him up in the bottom of the car, covering him with robes and enjoining him not to move. She put the other shirt on herself, and then tried to raise up the car's hood—to have it torn loose, and blown to shreds before she could begin to get the frame in place.

By now, the road space was littered with broken boughs, and the air surcharged with whirlpools of leaves intermixed with blinding snow—so large and thickly packed the flakes, that she could scarcely see a rod ahead. She feared to leave the car for an instant, lest she be blown away and fail to find it again. Thus for half an hour or more, partially sheltered in the lee of the woods, with a robe gathered about her head and

shoulders and Wolfine at her feet, she watched and waited; crouching behind the car, and momentarily hoping the storm would abate its wild fury. But the wind seemed to gain, rather than to diminish in intensity. With growing horror she foresaw the coming darkness and their being obliged to remain, the night long, where they were.

The more she dwelt on their predicament, the more thoroughly alarmed she became, and horrified, especially on account of her charge. Oh, why had she been so weak as to consent to take him?

Two or three times she essayed to shout; but her cries were drowned by the bellowing tempest, and not even Johnny was disturbed—for the present warm and snugly housed, and fast asleep. She became desperately lonely and depressed. She could almost have wished the boy awake, for the sake of his companionship.

"Poor girl," she said, patting the dog's snow-covered back. "What can we do? What a beastly, miserable scrape we're in—eh! And your old bones, too!"

Wolfine got up, shaking herself, and whined a reply —shoving up her head to lick the extended hand, shivering with the sudden cold.

"There's no sign of a refuge,—not for us, old doggie. We're in for it, I fear."

The dog cocked her head on one side, looking up askance, with doubtful, questioning eyes.

"No refuge, I said Wolfine—unless you find it."

At once Wolfine rose, her manner changed, her eyes deepening with shrewd intelligence. Several times she gamboled about her mistress, uttering short sharp barks, till, breaking away, she plunged into the thick woods. There followed an anxious five minutes for Catherine, when the dog returned, coming down the road from the

opposite direction to that where she had first disappeared amongst the trees, and scarcely visible until she was alongside the car. Here, at once grabbing the other's skirt in her mouth, she began pulling backwards, and endeavouring to drag Catherine with her.

And she, who knew the dog so well, appreciated that not only Wolfine was eager for her to follow, but that the way was probably safe, and the end desirable. But she dare not leave the boy for an instant—and notwithstanding her trust, she could not conceive what her dog friend had in mind. And then amidst the awful desolation of the storm, she cried aloud the name of him, who, for months past had, day by day, become gradually uppermost in her thought and heart.

"Jack, Jack, if you were only here!"

At once, and as she spoke, there flashed on her memory a picture of the little hut, built by the two, high up on its perch among the stunted trees—the "Refuge," as they christened it. It must be hereabouts, she thought —somewhere on the crest above. Wolfine had needed but the stimulus of the word, to seek and find it.

She knew that it could not be very far, considering the time Wolfine had been away. It was their best, if not their only chance. She must take the risk, and if so, at once—before complete darkness set in. She woke Johnny up, and wrapping about him the cover which had served to protect her own head, carried him on one arm, dragging the heaviest of the robes behind her, and turned directly and at right angles into the woods. The dog tried to make her take the road, but on Catherine's refusal did not insist, and soon led the way to a narrow fissure between two rocks. How well she remembered this, "The Gateway of the Refuge," as she and Jack had named it—so long, long ago. She noticed

that the way, often more like a tunnel than a path, was, as far as she could trace its course, cleared of brush and windfalls, except what might be covered by the old and newly fallen snow. How she and Jack had toiled in making the hut and its approach; finally calling in the assistance of Nat, and for his reward dubbing him the "Beast of Burden," while Jack was "Boss," and she "Lieutenant Kate." Surely, she thought, some partial shelter at least would be standing still. It was their great, if only chance.

CHAPTER XIII

THE REFUGE

THERE were several hundred yards to climb before the summit could be won; and the path was steep and tortuous, zigzagging between the trees and giant boulders. Twice Catherine had to stop and get breath. The boy was heavy, constantly fidgeting in her arms and begging to get down and walk. But she kept bravely on until they reached the top. Then her heart leaped with exultation to find the hut still there, apparently intact from roof to sill.

Groping at the door, she raised the heavy latch somewhat timorously, fearing what might dart without or be found lurking within, four-footed beast or creeping thing. But Wolfine, impatient of delay, with nose and paw forced an entrance for herself, and Catherine followed.

The inside, though sheltered from the wind, felt cold and repellant, with a darkness impenetrable as pitch, no light finding its way through the open door. Hesitatingly, she stepped forward, groping with her hands and making a circuit of the room. Yes, here was the stove, with a stack of neatly piled wood behind. She could feel a chair—a table—matches. She struck a light and immediately turned her attention to the stove. Its red, crusted appearance, belied its sound condition. She found it evidently unimpaired, and safe for use. To her astonishment, she discovered within a properly laid fire, all ready to ignite. She applied a match, and

then drew up to its coming heat a chair for Johnny, who, thanks to the robe and rubber shirt, had kept practically warm and dry. Hastily she glanced about, taking in the other more prominent appointments of the hut, which consisted in itself of but a single room covering an area of about fifteen by twenty feet, and built of unpeeled spruce logs. The interstices were closely wedged with moss, and the walls rising nearly ten feet at the front, sloped back to a man's height from the ground—the whole being papered on the inside with white birch bark. In the centre, at the rear end and where the eaves joined the frame, was inserted a fixed window, containing four small panes of glass. On either side of this, two folded cots of stretched canvas leaned against the wall; and into either corner, to right and left of the door, were built roughly-made shelves. The one contained cups, plates, knives and kitchen utensils above, with a wooden pail and wash basin below; the other a book or two, some antedated magazines, and a nameless litter of odds and ends. Three plain wooden chairs, a rustic bench, and a large old-fashioned trunk covered with raw calf hide —some of the reddish hair of which was still visible— comprised the remaining furniture.

How vividly, as if only yesterday, Catherine remembered it all—though so long ago it might have been a dream. She removed her rubber shirt, finding the snow had sifted in about her throat and neck; while from knees to feet, her clothes were soaking wet. The robes, too, were sodden with moisture, and the room soon filled with steam as she placed them to dry before the fire, now roaring upwards through the zinc stack. While thus engaged, the trunk caught her attention. "It isn't possible!" she exclaimed aloud. But when with great difficulty she had forced her numbed fingers to unbuckle the

straps, and raising the lid eagerly sought its contents, she cried out with delight. Directly, she was tossing out blanket after blanket of softest wool—red and grey—while the camphor balls laid between them rolled over the cedar-bark carpet of the roughly hewn floor. Johnny, lulled to sleep by the stove's warmth, but now awakened, pounced upon these, thinking them candy, and before he could be warned had one in his mouth. Its egress was quicker still, and Catherine had to go and comfort him. If she could only get him quiet. So she pulled out one of the cots and made up a bed for him. Then when she had taken off her dress and skirt, hanging them together with her shoes where they might best dry, she sat beside him covered with a blanket, her stockinged feet before the fire—her hair, a tangled mass, falling in glorious lustre to her waist. Softly, she sang every nursery song she could remember or invent. But Johnny's eyes would not close; and bye and bye his spirits seemed to flag, and his interest and attention to wander. At last:

"Oh, Daisy! I'm so awful hungry!"

"But I haven't anything at all for you—not a crumb, poor boy;" and she hugged him close in her bared arms.

"I'm so sorry, dear. You must be a brave little man, and try to go to sleep and forget about it."

"Yes," he sighed, very doleful as he laid himself down again; "I'm trying hard—awful hard, Daisy." And then with a child's swift transition of thought—

"I wish Jack'd hurry. Yes, he's comin'—I knows it. He'll have somefin for Johnny—sure."

She rose from the cot and sat by the stove, listening to the sweep of the storm as it beat against the side of the hut in impotent fury. Then for the first time she had an opportunity to weigh the dangers she had es-

caped, and reflect with a great dread—more particularly on the boy's account—upon what was still to come. Nobody knew where they were. She had not even left word in what direction they were going. It must have already become practically impossible for any one to travel the highway, with this blizzard raging in such ungovernable fury. No—no one would dare to venture abroad that night. And when the daylight came the roads would be still more blocked, and well nigh impassable. The car, too, the only indication of where they were, would most likely be buried out of sight.

She found that it was now half past eight o'clock. Her great comfort and hope was, that Mr. Rheinlander might be delayed as he had suggested, and the terrible anxiety that he would otherwise undergo be at least postponed. As to Nat and his mother, they were both in New York, and not expected to return until the middle of the week. Surely, on the morrow, the country would be searched far and wide. At daylight she would make the descent to the road—no matter what the depth of snow, and be ready at hand to point out where they were, or even struggle on alone to the nearest farm-house. Yes, rescued they surely would be; the only question being when, and also how long the boy must go without food. She smiled at the thought of how he was always proverbially hungry. For herself, she gave little thought. She had experienced many a more trying vigil than anything she imagined to be now before her.

Many recollections of her work as a nurse, as she sat before the open door of the stove, became absorbing realities, vivid as they were true, and filled her heart with a great content and happiness in the knowledge of work well done. One had to have passed through it all to grasp the power and influence of its memory, or to

comprehend the poise and colour it gave to a life. Likewise, as she well knew, wherever her allotted task had fallen, she had proved herself a faithful servant, and was both loved and valued. Memories grew more insistent and more personal. She got up and walked about the room; her thin silken stockings alone protecting the small, delicate, unshod feet, against the uneven, rough bark flooring.

She began examining the miscellaneous hangings, rods, pictures and traps that lined the walls. With an exclamation of delight she seized upon the smaller of two pairs of moccasins, suspended by their lacings from wooden pegs. How well she recalled both of them, made by herself, and embroidered with vari-coloured quills of porcupine. She drew the smaller pair on her feet. How perfectly they fitted her—she who was now as old again as when she fashioned them. And so they had hung there ever since! What a queer conscience the man must have! How sensitive must be his superstition! Surely he had done his part, and kept the pledge they made together as children, to keep the Refuge in order as it was,—"while life doth last"—and ready for any wanderer who might go astray. She took down the "Record Book" with its orthodox marble backing. The entries beginning July, 1893, read:

"Kate Marston
Jack Ingersoll } berries thick
Wolfine

Ditto—fishing.

Ditto—chopping."

And so on—for trapping, picnic, repairing, and the host of things that once brought them thither.

Often Nat's name was subscribed; and once only, that of James.

Then came an hiatus. Later were other entries, mostly Jack's. One of these was dated a few weeks since. The book showed that for years Jack and Nat had occasionally slept there, thus continuing a custom that had been theirs, off and on, in the old times when tending traps, or after grouse or deer. She smiled to recall how in those days the requirement of her formal consent as chatelaine of the manor and its preserves was an unbroken rule.

She replaced the book, a smile on her mouth, but tears on her cheeks. Here Johnny's voice interrupted, demanding—half asleep—his supper. Again she endeavoured to console him as before, but found it much harder now.

"I'm starving, Daisy—I knows it—sure. I'm going to die—I 'specs so;" and he hung his head sorrowfully, both hurt and aggrieved. Looking down into his robust chubby face flushed with sleep, she tried to laugh at his absurdity, but could not at sight of his solemn earnestness and evident distress. Moreover she dreaded the long night still before them, and then nothing for the boy's breakfast. She dare not think of the many hours they were likely to wait after daybreak, and before assistance came. She knew that the snow was piling ever thicker and faster, congesting the roads more and more with scattered drifts.

When once again the boy had dropped off to sleep, she pondered long and carefully on what she had better do—only to come back to the hopelessness of attempting anything. It would avail nothing now to send Wolfine, even with a written message. She could not get through. No; they must wait. There was nothing else

to be done. Surely by morning the gale would have exhausted itself.

Wolfine, in answer to the occasional glances in her direction, came and rested her head on Catherine's knee, her bold, fearless eyes, now soft and inquiring. Catherine put her hand on the grizzled head, saying:

"It isn't possible, doggie. We might have tried it once upon a time; but not now, and with Jack away." A sudden rush of feeling overmastered her.

"Jack, Jack, why must I always need you,—need you? Oh! It was never meant that we should part! How could you have done that cruel thing? I want you, Jack—I want you all the time!"

At this, Wolfine drawing back—a guttural grumble in her throat—balanced herself as if to spring, crouching low, her arched neck throwing the head half over with the upper ear cocked—as dogs beg when striving to better understand. But at this Johnny awoke, sitting up in bed and crying from a nightmare of ever vanishing milk, bread, pink cakes, and apple sauce. Catherine's attention diverted, the dog flopped down by the stove, no doubt to work out the problem by herself. And there she remained until the boy, after a protracted interval, was once more quieted, when she made for the door. Here she showed herself restless and uneasy, till raising the heavy latch with her snout at a single effort, she sped noiselessly into the night, where the storm now circling, challenging, whirling with ever increasing force about the hut, was threatening to tear it from its base.

While waiting for the dog to return, Catherine tied back her disordered, tangled hair, to the best of her ability; put on her linen skirt, now dry, and turned her blue serge dress, still wet and hanging by the fire. Then, after a glance at Johnny, she wrapped a blanket

about her and settled herself comfortably on the settee. She was quite tired, and began to feel very drowsy; but feared to sleep, lest Wolfine's efforts for admittance might re-awaken the boy. Heavier and heavier grew her eyelids, till, despite her anxiety and worry, the pervading sense of solitude, the warmth and the rhythm of the winds, lulled her to sleep and forgetfulness.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MESSENGER

IN Nat's comfortable den at the Gibson house, stretched out in a low easy chair, Jack sat thinking. At the time he left New York, early that morning, the day was fair and quite warm, remaining so until he reached the higher levels late in the afternoon. Then, as we have seen, without any appreciable warning, one of those sudden changes took place not uncommon to our New England hills, when the birth of spring is retarded by winter. He had been informed on his arrival, by Johnny's nurse, that the boy would most likely pass the night at the Grange, and as this was often the case when Nat was absent, he gave the matter no further thought. He had worked very closely through the week so as to be able to have Sunday at Dorset.

Jack's real object in coming to Dorset was forestalled by the lateness of the train and the storm. There was no use in attempting to visit the Grange, that night. He had had a most excellent, if solitary dinner, and with an extra log on the blazing fire, had passed a restful evening, with a happy outlook for the morrow when he should once again see Catherine.

The clock on the mantel struck nine, when stretching himself with a self-satisfied yawn, he began winding up his watch.

"Time for bed," he muttered, rising. "So much the better, I'm hours behind hand, in sleep."

He put out the light, and stood with his back to the

hearth, his thoughts still on Catherine, and wondering whether the storm would keep them indoors. That she would welcome him he took for granted—that she always did, now-a-days. But there were different degrees to that welcome. He was never able to forecast whether it would be cordial and friendly merely, or whether those splendid eyes would greet him, oh, so softly, beneath the shading lashes, and the sweetest voice ever man heard time its music, as if in harmony with what, she must surely be conscious, he felt for her. He knew that he had long been playing with a fire that seared and scorched him; and kept on—defiant of whether he was to be consumed or not. Before leaving the room, he went to the window and looked out into the night. But the glass was smeared with snow and sleet; and the pitchy darkness beyond, a hideous blank filled with storm demons shrieking and wailing in their fury as they tore past.

"I wonder how long man or beast could survive in such a blizzard," he began aloud. "Such a babel of discordant—"

He paused, catching his breath to better listen to a sound that seemed to come from directly beneath the sash. It was more human in its note, more even and steady in its close appeal, than the reckless, wilder hubbub of the elements. A moment later, after a tussle with the frost-glued frame, he shoved the window open, when—her eyes nearly buried in frozen sleet, and her hair bristling with points of ice—the long, powerful body of Wolfine dragged slowly over the sill and tumbled cluttering to the floor.

Scarcely had Jack turned from closing the sash when the dog had her fore paws on his shoulders, barking and yelping in great excitement, her tail swishing its pendent ice and snow on every side. It required his utmost

persuasion to calm her down, so that he might talk to her as long years of intimacy had taught him how. He knew at once from her actions that something far out of the ordinary must have taken place. But where, and to whom? And still Wolfine kept up her begging cry, refusing to be quiet. She strove betimes, now pulling him by the coat, then shoving with neck and shoulder, to push him towards the door. To this he finally yielded, passing into the next room, and thence under the same guidance into the hall beyond. Here the dog picked his hat off the table, handing it to him in her mouth. She was evidently insistent on his going out. Was it possible he could be needed by the Rheinlanders? At once he rang up the Grange, and, to his utter dismay, was told that there had been nothing heard of Catherine, Johnny, or Wolfine, since their departure in an automobile that afternoon. He was informed, too, that the master of the house was not at home, and was not expected back that evening. Also, that it had been supposed Miss Rheinlander and the boy were at the Gibson house. Jack replied that he was alone, and that Wolfine had but just come in, and that he should at once follow wherever the dog might lead. He also gave directions, that by break of day every available man at the Grange should be in readiness, the neighbourhood aroused, and the country scoured. He then tried in vain to get the constable at Dorset—the wires being down, as he afterwards ascertained. Putting up the receiver, he rushed, Wolfine at his heels, to his room, his own shouts and the yelping of the dog arousing the frightened household. He had no idea whither he was going. That he must leave to his guide. It was no time to analyse the possibilities, much less to weigh the dangers threatened by

such a night. He must leave at once, without delay. Catherine and the boy were in trouble.

Before many minutes, he had rigged himself in a winter hunting suit,—fashioned from white Hudson Bay blankets, with close-fitting Klondike hood attached —the loose jacket drawn tightly about his waist by a broad cloth strap. Several pairs of heavy woollen socks with low rawhide moccasins outside, protected his feet. Quickly he made ready and lighted a strong, wire-protected lantern. Then with a thick sweater tied about his neck, a flask of brandy in his pocket, and a short woodsman's axe thrust in his belt, he was making for the front door, when Wolfine got there before him and barred the way. Nor would she let him pass; but gripping his sleeve in her teeth pulled him back, working him towards a closet leading off the hall, the door of which in accordance with her evident desire, he opened. At once she plunged within, and whining, halted by a toting basket fitted with straps. It had been their luncheon basket, Kate's and his. He patted the dog's head, recognition and thanks in his touch, and with the basket in his hand hurried towards the kitchen. With the help of the servants, he soon had ready food and milk, together with a thermos bottle of hot tea from the crock still steaming on the range. These he wrapped around with the sweater and a thick shawl, the whole protected by a rubber blanket and tightly secured within the basket, which he strapped upon his back. Then man and dog plunged into the wild, bitter night.

CHAPTER XV

THE STRUGGLE

AT this time the storm, gathering in fury, was approaching its height, while the rapidly falling temperature transformed the sleet to pebbled ice, and condensed the large wet flakes into hard, dry snow. The blizzard tore madly on, sweeping in relentless wrath straight up the valley's open course, and Jack, able-bodied as he was, at once found the utmost difficulty in retaining his footing. Moreover the unfathomable darkness, augmented by clouds of driving, whirling snow, so confused him, that he could scarcely make out the lights from the house, or the flicker of the lantern held in his hand.

The dog, however, kept close by, on the weather side and touching him, her long legs spread apart and steadying her. Twice the man fell, bowled over by a force he found himself powerless to resist. If this was the beginning, what was to be expected further on? And then he grit his teeth, thinking what might be happening to Catherine and the boy. He essayed to go before the wind, if only for a few steps—but Wolfine would have none of it. Soon, after crossing the road, the dog edged him on till they had mounted the bank on the opposite side, and were facing a wood, still some distance off. Jack—the light in his lantern extinguished, and later its glass and frame hopelessly shattered, as measuring his full length on the ground he battered them against a rock—never forgot the crossing of that open wind-

swept space, through freshly ploughed fields not yet frozen hard and mostly bare, crawling as he was obliged to do on hands and knees in the eye of the gale. The exhaust from his lungs rasped short and hard, in spasmodic efforts to escape. Steadily, impatient of delay, the dog kept on; never hesitating on her course; through the inky blackness of the night. It seemed as if no respite would ever come to the endless passage of those fields, till finally Jack found himself encompassed by bushes and stunted growth, and presently within thicker woods. Here he was able to stand upright. By now, he was completely ignorant of his whereabouts.

Within half an hour, they had left the taller growth and entered a belt of high, thickly growing bushes. Very soon it began to dawn upon Jack where he might be. The noise of crashing timber, with the bedlam of bawling wind lessening for a moment, the sound of falling waters fell upon his ear. He knew that there was but one stream boasting a waterfall within many miles of Nat's house, and that its downward course led to the river at a point just above the rapids. He had, from the first, pinned his faith absolutely to Wolfine. He never questioned for an instant that he was being led straight to Catherine and the boy, and that they were in need of help. Nor did he have any doubts now. It occurred to him that the dog had taken the shortest cut to the road which lay on the river's farther side.

Again they stumbled forward, twisting and turning, walking and crawling through brush and swamp, up hill and down, over rocks and fallen trees. At last the rapids lay at their feet, its presence known only by the added roar of turbulent waters, dashing on the ice-caked shore. Here, Jack, greatly exhausted, with limbs and body racked and bruised by the desperate

labour, sat down. He felt spent. He peered over the river's bank—striving in vain to make out the waters boiling below. And then his eyes, squinting upwards through the narrow ice-rimmed slits of his frozen mask, caught a far-away twinkling glimmer. Once more the flicker came, much steadier this time. And therewith, faith took the place of despondency, and hope gave him new strength. There was a light on the hill top, where he knew the hut to be. Wolfine must have brought the others thither, and then sought him!

But how to get there? Jack dare not attempt to descend the bank; nor at first, could Wolfine tempt him any farther. But still insistent, and finding more civil measures useless, she seized him roughly by the coat, and with menacing growl steered him onward. So he followed the dog, and they headed down the ravine through which the stream was pouring.

Within ten minutes Wolfine came abruptly to a stop. Crawling on her belly, the other following suit, she wormed her way from the edge of the woods to the end of a platform of broad flat rock. This, partly covered with moss and slanting slightly upwards, extended over a fissure, where, twenty feet below, the swollen waters were dashing in impotent fury against the walls on either side. To the opposite bank of this chasm, and facing where the dog and man lay prone, the distance measured scarcely more than nine feet. But the take-off was wet and uncertain; and the landing, dropping towards the ravine, a shelving rock—treacherous with frozen spray.

The passage under such conditions was one to test the steadiest nerves, if made in broad daylight. In the utter darkness, with the wind bellowing madly through the gorge, it was ghastly. Failure meant death. But

with the goal before him, not for an instant did he hesitate. With his axe, he cut the pack from his shoulders and hurled both over, Wolfine following. Then he bent low, waiting for a lull in the tempest that he might dare the attempt himself.

Of what immediately followed, Jack never had a very clear recollection. He recalled, however, the coming of a more than usually severe blast, during which he was obliged to hug the exposed surface of rock with all the tenacity of which he was capable, and that during the few moments of relative quiet succeeding, he poised himself upon the edge of the brink, and then sprang with all his might through the utter blackness towards the other side. Also, that he could not on landing retain his footing on the slanting ice-varnished rock, but pitching headlong struck both head and breast,—on something —he knew not what. He remembered, very vaguely, grabbing the bushes and feeling their glazed coating slipping through his fingers,—his body despite his most frantic efforts gliding slowly down—when an iron grasp gripped his shoulder and pulled him back.

For some time he lay where the dog had dragged him, dazed and fogged. Later he sat up, his head throbbing painfully. After a while he was able to regain his feet, and with the pack suspended by a strap from his shoulder, he once more started. The way led up a tortuous ascent, through coverts scarcely penetrable, and often blocked by heavy boulders. But relatively, it was sheltered from the storm, and a course which he knew as well as his guide. Very slowly he travelled, and many times he fell—then rose again, heartened by his tireless friend. Often it seemed that he would never reach the summit. But he ground his teeth and struggled on, blindly groping his way upwards,—to reach the

hut faint and dizzy, and after fumbling with the latch, to stumble headlong in, amidst the shrieking of the storm and the joyful yelpings of Wolfine.

His mind was clear enough to take in the picture presented to his worn and clouded eyes. On one side was a child, startled from healthful sleep, and with eyes widely staring. On the other, the terrified face of a woman; short-skirted; a red blanket dropping to her feet; a wealth of bright glorious hair framing her uncovered arms and neck; her eyes filled with horror at this apparition covered with ice and frost—soiled from head to foot—spotted with reddish stains still fresh and moist. Then the reaction came. His head spun round. Pointing to the pack he stumbled forward, falling prostrate.

In a moment the woman was by his side. With anxious, fevered hands she removed the hood, disclosing a white face smeared with the congealed trickling from a cut by his temple. She saw that the bleeding had stopped, and turned her attention to his neck and shoulder, where the rent clothes were matted about a ragged gash. She dragged the cot nearer to the fire, and eventually removed the man's coats and waistcoat. Then, having cut away the coverings about his chest, she bathed and dressed the wounds, bandaging them and his forehead also, thankful that her experience had taught her how, and what was called for. The man lay very still. The smile she so loved rested on his face, and so calm and peaceful was his look, that it terrified her. There, bending over, she gazed long and earnestly upon the pallid face of her girlhood's love; her husband still, despite all. Nearer and nearer she stooped. Coming to her knees her lips kissed his. His arms—impelled by unconscious thought—

gathered about her neck. For a space she clung to him, mind and body pulsating in unison with the raging in her breast.

She had been oblivious to her surroundings, and unaware that two bright blue eyes, opened to their widest stretch, had seen it all.

Gradually he revived, and soon stood up; slightly groggy, but himself again; his body and head sore, but his mind once more clear. Then in answer to her questions he told her in few words of the dog's arrival, and how they had journeyed; explicit only when exploiting Wolfine. She did not interrupt; listening with eager, sparkling eyes, and flushed cheeks. At the end she thanked him, but very simply, pressing his hand in gratitude, while fearing to further trust her voice. She brought up the settee—a rustic bench they had made together—and covered it with blankets, arranging such excuse for a pillow as she could. Then she made him lie down once more, when she in turn related what experience had been hers and Johnny's, and how Wolfine had disappeared. And while she talked, she served the man, the dog, and herself with food,—the boy demanding no one's help, till, for once at least fully satisfied, he drowsily tumbled into bed. There Catherine tucked him up, and soon he was fast asleep.

From where he lay beside the fire, the man watched the so wonderfully pleasing face and form of the woman gliding here and there in her ministrations about the room, she ever conscious of the eyes that followed each movement, and her face still reddened by the memory of a happiness whose secret she believed unshared and hers alone.

And now they were alone; these two, so long estranged, brought close together by curious circumstances. And the strange condition ripened the mutual responsive sympathy which was theirs by right, and which neither time nor evil machination had been able to destroy. She cleared up the room, and rearranged the littered table, refusing his proffered help. Afterwards she fetched a pan of water and re-cleansed and dressed his wounds, washing them with brandy, and with deft and practised hands binding them up,—while she soothed and cheered him, striving to alleviate the pain she knew right well he must be suffering.

"You are very skilful," he murmured. "One would imagine you trained in the art."

"Now you must keep still," she told him, "else I cannot fasten it on properly. There—I think we've got it all right for the present. 'Trained,' did you say? Yes, I've been pretty well schooled in such matters. Once upon a time they accredited me to the first rank."

"What do you mean?"

"It was my living—for many years," she answered quietly.

He appeared incredulous, and was about to further question her, when she went on:

"Yes, I was a trained nurse. Mr. Rheinlander, a patient, adopted me. Why not? He once knew my people very well. Made a perfect lady of me, if you will," and she laughed, much amused at his complete astonishment.

"Really, how good of him!" he said, smiling back. "And how successfully done! But what a wonderful nurse still. What a loss to mankind. Yet how lucky for me."

CHAPTER XVI

PER CONTRA

BEFORE long, Jack felt much better and stronger, and walked about the room. Together, he and Catherine examined the varied collection hanging on the walls, nearly every one a chapter in the childhood's history of themselves. How, she thought, could any woman fail to be touched by the unaffected reverence he showed toward everything associated with his early playmate.

She paused before a rude sketch of a little girl, about twelve years of age, saying:

"Who is that, I wonder?"

"Miss Marston."

"Miss Marston? How came it here? Why this is a child, and she is pretty—quite!"

His face hardened and his eyes snapped; a habit he had whenever she chanced to allude to Kate—always with a hard inflection, if not disparagement, in her voice. And that, being an assumed prerogative of her sex, directed towards herself, while paining him at the same time—was one reason why she did it in defiance of the annoyance it caused him.

"Very likely she left it here herself," he answered coldly. "This place is part of her property."

Catherine was closely examining her child's effort,—cleverly done—and a grim smile broke on her lips.

"But this girl must have been quite pretty, I say."

"She certainly was—remarkably pretty."

"But some one surely told me that Miss Marston wore a wig, was a mass of freckles, and cross—or wall-eyed—I've forgotten which."

He straightened himself up in defiance of the sharp torturing twinge it brought to his shoulder, and looking straight at her, was about to make an angry retort, but controlled himself.

"Hardly that," he answered, with a forced smile.

"Forgive me. You are always so fierce on that delectable lady's qualities, that one cannot help teasing you. How does she look now?"

"I have not seen her very lately. But don't you think we had better drop her name out of our conversations? You don't know her; or fail to—quite—appreciate her, perhaps as I do. She was—her father was—both of them, in fact, were very dear and valued friends of mine."

"But listen! Hark! Do you hear?"

"I hear nothing."

"That's just what I mean. The storm is done—and we never knew it!"

He rushed to the door, Catherine closely following, and threw it wide open to the early morning. The day had not yet broken, but in place of the turbid blackness of the wild night shone starlit heavens reflecting on pine and hemlock. These, glistening under their matted loads of snow and ice, and scarcely swayed by the light breeze soughing through the forest, laughed at the exhausted storm whose fury they had survived and braved.

The two stood side by side, closely touching in the narrow doorway, watching the weird shapes moulded on the coated trees, and drinking in the restfulness of

the wooded hills—their thoughts with each other. One by one the stars twinkled out of sight. The last breath of wind had sighed itself away, when over the distant range flashed the radiance of day, sweeping across a glorified fairyland of ice-hung shrub and tree, to rest on the upturned faces of the man and woman.

"The flush of dawn," she murmured. "How beautiful it is. And with it peace."

Slowly she turned to him with shining eyes and placed her hands in his. It was part of the re-action after the vigil of the night and the strain of the storm, followed by the marvellous beauty of the morning—all of which had played upon her sensitive nature, keying it to its highest tension. Then with equal suddenness and from the same cause her spirit underwent a violent change. With something of the vividness and speed with which images succeed one another when the mind is overwrought, before her eyes, as he bent his head to hers, suddenly there flashed the vision of a darkly handsome face disfigured with blows.

She tore herself from him with a cry of horror, and pushing him aside rushed back into the hut.

"Leave me," she sobbed, motioning him to stand back as he followed after, her voice choked and distraught. "You—who trampled her under foot!"

Thus rudely awakened from a rapture wonderfully sweet, he remained, at first, struck dumb with astonishment, wondering whether he had heard aright. But seeing the woman standing there before him, trembling from head to foot; with averted face; with humiliation in her pose, and a sob at every breath, his troubled thought hardened to anger. He glanced at her menacingly, an obstinate tension about his mouth; then

shrugged his shoulders, and abruptly turning his back, sunk down on the nearest chair, one hand pressed against the reopened wound in his chest.

She saw the crimson stain slowly gathering at the edge, and made towards him; in her fear and sorrow forgetting all, except that she had hurt him.

"No," he commanded, repelling her, anger and disgust in his face. "So we have come to this at last, you and I, and our precious friendship?" He reached for his discarded coat, and tearing out the lining covered the wet bandage. "No, I won't have it, I tell you. This cloth may not be so soft or fine as yours, but it will answer till I get away."

"Please do let—"

"Not for an instant! You have surely gone too far, this time, to stop. What has it all meant—from the beginning? At first you were put out by our misadventure in London. But that was too small a thing to harbour all these months. It would be too unlike you, too unworthy of any one. For Heaven's sake tell me what you mean."

She winced at his words, heartbroken at the pain and sorrow in his face.

"Yes;" he went on evenly, and ignoring her distress. "I ask you to explain. You charge me with—I know not what. Something about 'trampling' some one. For Heaven's sake, out with it!"

His indignation had gone, and in its place she saw sorrow and discouragement in his listless air. She was still more unhappy than himself, and knew not what to say or do. The mood of exaltation, of unselfish, ethereal passion, had been followed by a revulsion. The vision that had overtaken her, of Norna's poor wounded face had been almost tangibly real. Now both moods had

gone, and in the reaction she felt aimless, sad, dispirited.

She remained silent, and he continued: "If I only knew the way, I'd unearth what was the real truth, or rather untruth between us. Have you all these months been playing fast and loose with me—for your entertainment? Why did you to-night show so much of your real self to me? Why have you thus acted—knowing as any woman must, that you held me body and soul?"

"Don't, don't. I cannot answer you now. I cannot bear—and you have bound it so horribly! Oh, please let me fix it!"

Once more he held her off, though the man longed to feel her touch.

"Not if it saved my life, I tell you—unless you explain what you mean. What wrong have I done? 'Her,' you said. What woman—bah—have I 'trampled under foot'?"

"Let me tend your shoulder then, at once—and afterwards I'll answer you. I swear it. Please!"

And this he allowed, his wound sore and his spirit broken—yielding to her gentleness.

"Thank you very much," he said. "Well, what have you to tell me?"

She crossed the room, and fetching the sketch of herself thrust it into his hand.

CHAPTER XVII

"GOOD-BYE"

SUDDENLY the scene was interrupted by the joyful barking of Wolfine, who darted through the door and plunged into the close lying woods. Then, presently, shouts were heard from the roadway, followed by the coming of half a score of men, with James, well nigh exhausted, in the van.

At the first alarm the latter had gotten ready, and long before daybreak managed to work his way to the village, where, recruiting a score of men bribed with cash from his own hoard, they had broken out the road till they came to the nearly buried car. Directly, he was satisfied where his mistress must be; and reassured by the prompt appearance of the dog, the deep anxiety which throughout a long night had terribly depressed the old servitor, gave way to his more habitual and assumed crabbedness.

"I sees you and the boy is safe, Miss, thank the Lord!" was his first greeting, as out of breath he stood awkwardly before Catherine, twisting his cap, and with eyes suspiciously moist. "And here's some grub, Miss, as I steals from the house," he added, giving her a bundle wrapped in wet newspaper. Swiftly, and before she had even time to thank him, he continued, his manner changed and irritated: "What was that I'se a telling yer—not to unkiver them peonies, Miss! They was sure a ruined now if I ain't a kivered them back,

unbeknown all by myself. Humph! Tell old James his business, eh!" And with a contented grunt—half chuckle, half good-bye—he joined the others in clearing a path to the road.

Catherine, more touched than amused, remained for an instant watching his retreating back, when Johnny twitched her sleeve.

"Say, ain't it bully, Daisy—and I promise not to tell—no, never, Daisy. I never, never tells—no one."

She did not know quite what to say, but was glad enough to escape having her last scene with Jack made a matter of gossip. So she gathered the child up in her arms—to him the best answer possible.

When all was ready, and the boy well on his way to the road, the other two lingered behind. Jack, holding out his hand, broke the awkward silence between them.

"Good-bye, and adieu," he said manfully, though his voice trembled, and she saw that he shook slightly—afraid of himself and her.

There was something so fixedly determined, so definite in his manner, that she at once divined his thought and purpose. Both recognised that this was no time for further demand or explanation. But she meant to hold him, for she knew the hour must soon come when she could contend no longer.

She waited a few moments, desperately thinking.

"Will you agree to something I ask—no matter what," she suddenly begged, pleading with him. "Something to really please me? Will you?"

"Yes—if I can."

"Will you give me your word to come to me, if I need you? If I say I want you?"

"Yes, I will promise that."

"No matter how hard it may seem, or under what circumstances?"

"Yes."

"Then good-bye—if only for a while;" and she fled from him and joined the others.

When the tip cart which fetched them home had left the Gibson house, Johnny, with much appearance of secrecy, pulled Jack aside.

"Say, Jack, I 'specs I shan't tell no one—never—"

"Tell what, boy!"

" 'Bout Daisy's kissing you. You know I sees it, Jack. I did."

"Say that again—when?"

"No, you can't fool me, Jack—no, you can't. I sees it time you just come back and look so awful. Yes, I promise Daisy, I tells no one—not even Dad—no—never!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SAFE

MAY—breathing its soft balmy odours of delicately scented arbutus, of resinous pine, of bursting buds and tender sweet-scented grasses, redolent with frost-freed perfumes exhaling their earthy freshness—May, springtime, had come at last! Each living shrub was struggling to robe itself anew. Sheep and cattle browsed on the hillsides, overlooking the straining oxen yoked to ploughshares in the hollow. The forests rustled with newly awakened clamorous life; while the feathered nesters from hedge and grove and treetop, poured out their song of glory with swelling throats.

One morning Catherine, following her daily custom, was arranging the flowers in the library, when Mr. Rheinlander entered accompanied by Nat Gibson, who had just arrived. Neither she nor Johnny had been much the worse from their exposure to the storm; although it had fared badly with Jack, who, shortly after arriving in New York, found himself obliged to go to the hospital. The ten days he remained there had been a distressing time for Catherine, who was with difficulty persuaded by her father not to go to him. She certainly would have done so in spite of all remonstrances, if he had not rapidly begun to mend. But he was greatly weakened by the untoward strain he had undergone, and as soon as it had been considered safe, was

ordered abroad for the sake of the sea voyage and an extended rest.

After greeting Catherine, Nat at once stated the object of his call, which was to notify Mr. Rheinlander that business of an important nature called him away, and that he must drop everything else and leave that afternoon. The other had the appearance of being greatly annoyed.

"How far do you go, and for how long?"

"I leave the country, and the time is indefinite."

"Really, Mr. Gibson! With the Judge tied up trying a case in New York, and Ingersoll invalided and away, I should have supposed that my affairs were fully as important as any other call upon your time. In fact, they will hardly brook further postponement. You know how anxious I have been to have them pushed along. Can't you arrange differently?"

"No, I am afraid not. I am very sorry to refuse, but am obliged to go. With your sanction, I will place your more pressing affairs in other, and in every way competent, hands. For myself, I am compelled to leave."

"And I desire that you remain—at least until I may communicate with Judge Eggleston."

"It is impossible. I must go to-night."

"Very well, then. Naturally I fail to appreciate the necessity."

The tone in which this was said was expressly designed to irritate Nat,—which it did. It was, too, a very awkward position for him, knowing that he was alone responsible, at that time, for the conduct of the enormous amount of business Mr. Rheinlander had given the firm; and that he had no excuse, such as he was willing to make even to his partners, for his contemplated neglect.

He hesitated before replying, and then:

"You have been very kind and generous to us," he faltered. "I feel compelled to offer some explanation. I had hoped you might trust me, and believe in my necessity. However, I will say this much." He paused, as if to collect himself, and, after turning his back to Catherine, continued slowly, weighing each word:

"The interests of two persons, both once dear to me as life itself, are in desperate case, involving the honour of my closest friend. The points involved cover a long stretch of time. The trouble had its origin in my own foolishness. I am confident there was never the slightest ground for the suspicion entertained against the one in whose behalf I am now speaking. The circumstances, however, are deplorable. Were Miss Marston only here, she would be compelled to admit as much. Such evidences and briefs as we possess are locked up, in there;" and he pointed to where the safe was. "But the one most important and conclusive link to vindicate my friend is missing. The only one that can really set him right. That link exists. I am sure of it. I believe I know where it is to be found, and go to fetch it. Neither the firm, nor any member of it, knows my destination or the reasons for my going." And without glancing at either, or giving opportunity for reply, he turned quickly on his heel and left the room, his client's manner changing to one of marked satisfaction and approval, while Catherine was filled with dismay and fear.

Mr. Rheinlander had long since retired, and Catherine lay restless on her bed, unable to sleep, revolving in her thoughts the events of the morning and how Nat had so shrewdly suggested his knowledge of her identity. It

had taken her completely by surprise, and his words puzzled and frightened her. She recalled other acts of his, trivial ones and not noticeable at the time they happened, together with the fact that he was the last one who had seen her as Kate. And in the long discussion with her father that followed his departure, she eventually came to the conclusion that Nat, from the beginning, must have suspected who she was, was now certain of it, and was seeking through his proposed absence to help Jack in some difficulty arising from her unexpected reappearance. As to solving what the difficulty was to which he alluded, that would be mere guesswork. It might be anything—more probably involving the relations of Jack as executor to Mr. Marston's estate. Very likely the property had been made over to Jack, as the will provided in case of the daughter's decease. Therefore, Nat,—now knowing her to be alive, and fearing his friend might be unjustly accused of misappropriation, or embezzlement, or what not—was aiming to forestall, in some way, the embarrassment which might ensue from such an unexpected turn of affairs. All of which went to show that Nat must be in complete ignorance of Jack's having lived a double life; and also that he knew nothing about Norna. She sighed wearily at the futility of it all; of this constant bickering with herself as to what she was to do, or could or ought to do, when her heart yearned to ignore and forgive the past and the wrong done her, and to cling to the present with the husband she could not live without. Alas, if only he would but admit his wrong doing, and thus enable her to pardon him.

But in case she yielded herself to him, as matters now stood—what then? No good could ever come of it. She wondered—though knowing full well that there had

never been the slightest room for doubt—what she would have felt or done, if, after coming back from exile, her father's investigations had shown his crime, in any way or for any cause, one possible to forget. She would not dwell on this—the very idea was too inconceivable. But what if he had been proved innocent? But there—she would fetch a book and distract her morbid thoughts, and perhaps lure a little sleep.

She got up, and putting on her dressing gown went into the library, where, after turning on the light, she wandered along the line of bookcases till she came to a shelf which, in her childhood, had been set apart solely for her own use. Taking out a specially bound volume of fairy tales, whose reading in those days had been more wont to keep her awake, she listlessly opened it at the "Tale of the Forty Thieves." Between the leaves lay an envelope, closed and sealed.

Ever since the day she received Nat's note, mentioning that the safe contained matters of "incalculable concern to Miss Marston," which were kept there that she might have "immediate access to them on her return," she had wanted to see what it contained. This desire was now strengthened by what had happened that morning, and she was filled with an overwhelming curiosity to view the safe's contents. Surely, no one had a better claim than herself; and Nat's note, on the face of it, expressed her unqualified right so to do. Was it not conceivable, that he had this very end in view all along? Yet how had he supposed she was going to unlock the door? Then it came to her, that it was she, who after her father's death, had first discovered to him where the safe was concealed, a secret before that time known only to Mr. Marston and herself. She recollected how she had opened it in his presence, by means of the key and

combination taken from the very book which she now held in her hands. With trembling fingers she broke the seal, and took from the envelope a small slip of paper and a key. She looked about guiltily, though smiling faintly and amused at the fact of burglarising her own property.

"He may have meant nothing at all," she argued. "In which case the old combination has certainly been changed. However, I'll make a try at it now, and discover what is inside if I can. If I fail, I'll get father to have the door picked or forced open later—come what will."

So saying, she put out all the lights, and after listening to hear if all was quiet in the house, with a shaded candle at her side knelt down in front of the safe, and soon had the door swung back. Directly before her, so placed that it could not possibly have been overlooked, lay a large envelope, its superscription clear and distinct. "'Mrs. John Grafton Ingersoll,'" she whispered. Trembling, she took it off the shelf where it lay, and opened it. The papers within were numbered in the order of their reading, beginning with a note in Nat's handwriting directed to herself and written the year before she returned to the Grange. There was no preamble.

"December, 1908.

"Some day you may see these papers. Whether you do or not, the fact of your marriage will remain buried as before—or until you choose to disclose it.

"The deplorable mystery—known only to yourself or those to whom you may have chosen to confide it, and on account of which you have wantonly wrecked the life of the best and kindliest of men—is, so far as

I am aware, yours alone. If there is any reason under heaven, if there exists one scintilla of legitimate excuse, I cannot imagine or suspect what it is—nor, do I believe, does he. But he is now no longer responsible for your acts, past or present—they are between your conscience and your God.

"Your desertion, your note, your continued cruelty is to me as unparadonable as it is unfathomable. You explicitly denied that you acted under the least compulsion. You stated that it was your own act; that you never wanted to see his face again. You were younger then. You are now a grown woman of twenty-six. And still not a word! Alive, you still continue to persist in the course you took. If dead—I trust so. It would be the best solution."

And that was all—cold and implacable in its indictment.

Then followed a memorandum reciting how Jack, coming home, found her gone; of the meeting at the Grange, and how Jack was compelled to depart at once and join his regiment in Cuba.

To this was appended the unopened letter from Jack which she had never received—breathing affection in every line; together with Kate's letter, in the margin of which a query was entered against the word "promise."

Then came the following letter, written from Cuba, and addressed to Nat:

"At the Front, July 15/98.

"*My dear Nat:*

"Three letters from you, and one from Judge Eggleston dated the first of July, were received in a bunch yesterday.

"I must first thank you, and very earnestly, for all you have done for me. I shall never forget it.

"Now I want to put clearly before you my position on one or two points, and to ask your further help, so that we may all pull the same way. This in Kate's interest, and as a duty I owe to the Pastor, to myself, and to the happy days before this trouble came.

"You tell me that up to the time of your last writing, with the sole exception of some one answering to her general description making inquiries at the wharf, no clue has been found. Also, that the matter is still in the hands of the Agency, with instructions to leave no stone unturned, no expense spared, in continued researches,—which are to be conducted, however, and as before, with the utmost secrecy. Further, that if any inquiry should be made for her by any one, the impression is to be casually conveyed that she went abroad immediately after her father's funeral.

"There is one matter, in regard to which I desire to be most explicit. I have before me the copy you forwarded of Mr. Marston's will, making me his sole executor, and the Judge and myself co-trustees of his estate. Accept for me both of these positions. This testament of the dear old man, touching me so closely in its generous affection and confidence, has wellnigh unmanned me. Mark how from first to last the thought of Kate prevails, and as an element thereof and inseparable to his mind—all clearly to be read between the lines—he admits me as an integral part of his daughter's happiness, and seeks to bind us in our mutual interests as joint children of his own!

"His entire property, with the exception of the Grange, is left in trust for Kate and her issue surviving her; and on her decease and in default of such issue, then

to me outright, free and discharged of any trust. The Grange, he realises, as he attests, had been a retreat where he might strive to hold in check the infirmity that beset him, and where Kate might pass her childhood until such time as she was better able to face the world alone. Tactfully, he saves for her the place, if it has continued to her liking; and then he paves the way by which she may dispose thereof, if she so desires, and without reflection on her loyalty to him! He leaves it to her election to settle at the Grange within a year; in default of which, the executor is ordered to sell the property at the expiration of that time, and deposit the price with the residue of his estate!

"I must stay where I am until the war is ended, though every minute I am away and unable to give my personal attention to discovering where she is, will be a nightmare. I am therefore obliged for the present to put the whole matter of finding her and unravelling this enigma, in your and Judge Eggleston's hands. Leave no stone unturned. Never forget this—that Kate is still my wife. I shall act on that basis in every particular. Nothing that has happened could alter me in this regard; and you, who are taking my place during my absence, must never forget this. You and the Judge, together with my mother, alone know of our marriage.

"Kate speaks of 'keeping her promise.' Therein I am intuitively certain lies an explanation of the whole mystery. Find out what this statement means, and I believe the elucidation we seek will follow. I have tried in vain to recall any promise she ever made me. Recollect, I repeat, that we must conduct our investigations so quietly, that this trouble shall never be heard of beyond our little circle. Neither her character nor her intentions are to be made food for gossip.

"Again, I know that she is mentally honest in what she is now doing. It does not lie in her to be anything else. I have not the remotest doubt in my mind that, unless she is under some sort of compulsion, she believes the path she has chosen to be absolutely justified,—in fact the only one open to her. We have, therefore, no right to condemn her.

"There is, too, another side of this case which must be considered. The blame for all this happening she pointedly puts on me. One can form no other conclusion. Let it remain there. But I am at an utter loss to conceive what she means. There is nothing in my past life that I should have shrunk from laying bare to her. I do condemn myself, though, for having left her so long, and for not coming back from Europe with the intent of trying to win her father round to a fuller recognition of our marriage. I should have compelled the time to telegraph my change of steamer. I might also, perhaps, have settled my mother on the other side and returned to this country, and thus been nearer to Kate in case she needed me. But this last was before her all along, and could hardly have been the cause of such sudden and strange action on her part.

"Our relations have always been peculiar—or, I should say, unique. You know what they were as well as I. I was glad to have married her. I am glad still. When we were separated, I began to realise more and more as time went on how fond I was of her.

"I have, however, a feeling of terrible depression on her behalf; a growing certain fear that she is desolate and unhappy, as also, and unquestionably, under the delusion of a ghastly mistake. And that feeling carries with it a sickening sense of dread that she is suffering; and that in some way unknown to me, I, who loved

and ought to have protected her, have caused her misery.

"I enclose, duly executed, the papers, etc., which you sent me for signature. You fully understand that any expense attendant on this affair is to be paid for by me, and not one cent charged to the estate. I send, too, under separate enclosure, my will, duly executed. With the exception of a few trifling legacies, it is drawn in favour of Kate only. Likewise a complete list of my properties, and the key to the vaults where they are kept; together with full powers of attorney in your behalf.

"I want the Grange, house and premises, kept up in every respect the same as heretofore—always ready for Kate at any time she may arrive, day or night—with flowers, etc., where she was wont to put them. I realise that the estate ought not to be mulcted for this, and therefore enjoin you to pay all such expenses, as well as those hereinafter alluded to, out of my personal property. If my income should not be sufficient, draw on my capital—only keeping the Marston estate, under all circumstances, absolutely intact. We can arrange about selling the house when the stipulated time has expired, and if Kate has not then returned. It is a year off. My mother is provided for by a large annuity, which is more than her wants require.

"One other thing. I look upon Wolfine as a part of the Grange, and one of the family. Better, she was Kate's dear and close friend. The thought of one is almost inseparable from the recollection of the other. See that an arrangement is made by which her wants in all respects are insured, and her every comfort looked after.

"Do all this personally, Nat, and for Kate's sake as well as mine. We run against some tough problems, and learn many hard lessons in this world. One goes

through dark and dreary experiences, and when and where one least expects them. But the clouds will break —I am sure of it—and we shall have Kate back again, and with her the certain sunshine that her presence always brings. It must be so. Keep me advised on everything. If cornered, lie like a man, and say Kate is in Europe. It will never be recorded against you. See that all letters to Kate are put away in the safe, in the order of their coming. Also that her books and work, and all the trifles associated with her daily life, remain as she left them—to welcome her home.

"Sincerely
"JACK."

"To Nathaniel Gibson, Esq."

"PS. As I said, I have no idea when we shall get through here. None of us seems to have much of a wholesome respect for the Spaniard. Perhaps we make a mistake. He may cause us to change our minds later. But at present, our men do not seem to take that view!"

Thereafter was a rescript, in detail, of the means employed and the extended efforts made to discover Kate, and how the world was searched in vain to find some trace of her. It was related also, that the management of her father's estate had been turned over by Jack to Judge Eggleston and Nat, and its revenues allowed to accumulate—with a schedule of what the property now consisted. To this was appended a note, explaining that the Grange had been sold in accordance with the provisions of the will, but was bought by Jack himself, at a price well beyond its market value, and at once made over to Kate Marston by a deed not yet recorded, but still in the Judge's keeping. It spoke also with ill con-

cealed anger, and tears too in every line, of how Jack had to date kept up every detail of the old order of things at the Grange, in order that it might be ready at any moment to cheer and welcome the run-away's return—impelled by a chivalrous loyalty for the wife who had so cruelly thrown him over, and for his friend the Pastor whose daughter she was.

And all this he had manfully carried through for now ten years, struggling in the face of continued humiliation and disappointment, with hope getting day by day more and more distant and shadowy, paying every item of expense out of his own pocket, and eventually to his threatened impoverishment; until, poor in purse, and saddened, mortified, and sick in spirit, her cruelty had conquered!

One more document remained, sealed and addressed to herself. It contained this statement:

"Ten years ago, she who was my wife left me. I have heard nothing of her since, and do not know whether she is dead or alive. I have not the remotest conception why she took the course she did. I can only surmise that she discovered some act on my part which she could not tolerate, and against which her greater refinement revolted; one which her tender age and inexperience may not have realised as common to all men. I do not deny that she had plenty of such wrong doing to choose from. Perhaps if she had been older, she would not have expected or demanded so much, and forgiven me—as I do her. She shall always have the protection of my name, no matter to what strait she may have come. On the other hand, however deep the affection for my child wife may have been, I should prefer never to see the grown

woman, as I do not know her. I hope never to hear of her, unless she needs and demands my help."

. . . . . .

Above the scattered papers littering the floor knelt a woman, her agonised face drawn and haggard, her hands crushed together in suppliant prayer, her hollow voice scarcely articulate in its wail for guidance.

Sometime later she rose and summoned her father. Then, without any words, but merely pointing to the open safe, she passed on with faltering footsteps to her chamber, and closed the door.

CHAPTER XIX

SURRENDER

IT is difficult to form any true conception of the forces that battled in Catherine's heart at this time. She herself found them hard to analyse rightly.

She argued that Jack's final letter, appended to Nat's statement, might well be read between the lines as a general admission of much the same class of evil-doing on his part, as the particular sin which separated them. And yet she had been prepared to wipe out that past and begin her life anew and with him, driven by the longing in her soul for the new man she had come to adore—an influence which at once overpowered and minimised every other consideration and memory.

"Notwithstanding everything," she said to her father, "what is he not proved to have done in my respect? What since that day when I, his wife,—totally oblivious to where it led him—left him all alone, to battle for his redemption, single handed? What would my father have said to such a Christianity? It was you who first pointed out to me that, despite everything, my wifehood carried with it the highest obligation. Truly my own sense of duty was strangely blunted. If the debasing sin was his—what may be said of my indifference? I did nothing whatever to encourage him. I did not lift a hand to help regenerate him. Nevertheless, I believe he has done this completely—and by himself. What becomes of my self-reliance, my selfish egotism which allowed no quarter; the rank disloyalty and shallow pride

which waited for no explanation, which admitted no possible ground for forgiveness? During all these wretched years, I have maintained a closely-hugged, concentrated, narrow selfishness,—bitter and unforgiving—while his bettered life, his fortune, both became a sacrifice for me —yes, for me—and my memory a beacon for his best endeavour. Oh, the nobility, the sublime pathos of his loyal affection, repentance,—call it what you will—might cause the very stones to weep in sympathy!"

When her father asked her what she intended doing, she declared that she had irrevocably determined to join hands with him, come weal, come woe, the moment he returned; the only shame she felt being that she had not done so long before.

"Telling him who you are, and everything else, you mean?"

"Tell him who I am?" she cried passionately—"What else is there to do? As to the rest, he must know by this time that I am as well aware of his having been married as if he had confided it to me himself."

"Yet he once—"

"Don't, don't, Father. I know what you would say; but therein you are thinking of two vastly different men. One of them has ceased to exist. He belongs to a buried past. The present and future remain—for whatever they may have in store for us. That's where I look for happiness. I would willingly give the rest of my life for one small measure of it."

He looked at her very tenderly, but with a triumph in his eyes, whose sympathy she felt rather than understood.

"And for all time?" he questioned.

"Yes, for all time;" she admitted earnestly, "now and in the world to come."

"So then, if he had been proved guiltless, there would be nothing left?"

"You do not understand, Father," she returned, her cheeks paling. "Then it would have been something beyond words! Oh, for the joy of his innocence, I would willingly crawl to him on bended knees, penitent, exultant, happy—and with the same breath ask his forgiveness, and die!"

"But, guilty though he was, you know that he would nevertheless refuse to receive you again. The memorandum in the safe told you as much."

She looked at him searchingly for a moment, when flushing rapidly she replied:

"On that one point, dear, I am afraid you don't quite appreciate either Jack or me!"

One afternoon towards the closing days of May, Catherine sat on the western porch of the Grange, her eyes absently travelling over the broad panorama of constantly shifting shadows sloping beneath, till reaching the river winding through the lowlands, the perspective rose sharply upwards to where the horizon was lost in the angle of sky and mountain top. Her face and figure, grown slightly thinner, indexed the many anxious hours and the keen suffering that had been hers. But she had chosen her path at last.

And gazing across the valley, her heart prayed that she might be forgiven for the selfish haste, the callousness, the disloyalty that had caused her to desert her husband, leaving him to work out his own salvation or sink deeper in the mire, as chance might direct. And thus craving some little touch of the pervading peace which ruled about her, a rest for which her soul seemed to provide no place, the song of a thrush—her friend now

of many days—broke upon the stillness. She answered it in kind, coaxing the bird nearer and nearer, till, perching on a shrub close by, it sang a last good-day, assured, triumphant, happy—then swiftly turning darted to its nest and mate.

She kept her eyes on the bird till it was lost to sight in a distant copse.

> "'Mahnt mich nicht dass ich alleine
> Bin vom Frühling ausgeschlossen,'"

she murmured wistfully.

"Say rather that your bird friend is striving, by his example, to keep a brave heart in you," Mr. Rheinlander broke in, coming from the house.

"Take courage, dear. Don't harbour, don't tolerate morbidness. You have every chance of happiness ahead. Take my word for it. But I came to tell you I've just received a belated wire from our friend Gibson, to the effect he has returned and will be at Judge Eggleston's by eight o'clock. He says it's the Judge's birthday, and is most insistent on our being there also."

"We must go, of course. Oh, I wish I had some little present to take with me."

"Give him a kiss then—one for each of his seventy odd years."

"I'm afraid he would think them pretty cheap at that rate," she laughed. "But we must have dinner early, if we hope to get there in season. If you don't mind I'll see to it at once;" and she hurried indoors, leaving the other gravely wondering what, if anything, Nat had particularly in mind.

CHAPTER XX

THE JUDGE'S BIRTHDAY

THE Judge was delighted with the present he received, and which Catherine bestowed. He referred to it later, and with great glee, after his guests were established in his study.

"You have wiped off, for good and all, ten years to say the least, young lady. Why, the last time, was,—let me see," and then,—a shadow coming over his cheery face—"yes, yes, that was very long ago."

"Miss Marston, perhaps?"

It was Nat speaking, who added quickly:

"Strange how long you had to wait for history to repeat itself."

The Judge frowned. But Nat gave no indication that he was at all aware of the glance with which his senior favoured him, but directing the other's attention to a touring car coming up the avenue, remarked:

"If I'm not mistaken, here comes another friend you were awaiting, Mr. Richard Craig."

"Yes, yes,"—the Judge answered, jumping up, "He telephoned this afternoon that we might expect him early in the evening," and he hurried away to receive his visitor.

Silence followed, Catherine distrait, as if absorbed, continuing to look out of the window; while Mr. Rheinlander after a few moments' puzzled thought, inquired earnestly:

"Was your trip successful, Gibson?"

"Very—in part. The final result remains to be seen."

"Did the Judge tell you he expected any one?"

"Yes—this man, invited by him at my special request," he returned shortly. The other's reply evidently much elated his questioner, irrespective of the manner in which it was given. At this moment their attention was diverted by a measured, cultivated voice coming from the hall, saying:

"Judge, I am tremendously pleased to get here. An American country home, and in such a beautiful spot as this, is something I've been a stranger to for years. It was very kind of you to take me in. Your invitation to be in time for dinner was a sore temptation. I might, however, have kept you very late, so I managed to do very well for myself a couple of hours ago."

"You are most welcome at any time. I've wanted to get hold of you for many a day." And entering the room the Judge, his face beaming, presented his friend to the others.

The newcomer was of medium height, with a strong clean-shaven face, and a manner indexing the assured self-possession of one who felt he knew life. In the interchange of talk that followed his coming, he was led to tell of some of his varied experiences and travels; and for the next half hour made himself so agreeable, in a guarded way addressing his conversation chiefly to Catherine, that she wondered whether this could really be the same man who was the central figure of that garden scene where the puppy met its death.

All at once Mr. Rheinlander exclaimed:

"There—I have it—now you speak of Colorado! Pardon me, but you and I have met before, Mr. Craig. It was at a Schützen Fest—I am quite sure of it—near Denver—during a great round-up. Your gun play is

not easily to be forgotten. I remember your winning against all competitors."

"Yes, indeed, I recall the time perfectly. I used to be very fond of that sort of thing."

"Most men would be; that is if they were able to shoot as you did. You keep it up, of course?"

"More or less. It is the one accomplishment at which I am naturally expert—so I generally carry a gun about with me. In an unsettled part of the country, I always do. So many an opportunity offers."

"Or a dog—to practise on?" Nat questioned.

"Yes—if you will, and it becomes necessary," the other answered good naturedly. "I see you remember that temperamental defect of mine. Curious—but I would still much prefer to tackle a grizzly bear than run up against a peevish dog. I have a revolver now in my overcoat pocket—against an odd chance. Moreover I thought I would add a touring trip to the pleasure of visiting my old friend here, and suspected the road might be pretty lonely after striking the uplands."

"The roads are safe enough," the Judge stated.

"Yes, yes," said Nat, his face inscrutable, "unless our friend should run foul of Mr. Marston's old wolf hound. They say her ghost still roams these hills."

"What's that you say?" cried his host.

"Nothing—just bluffing," was the reply.

Later, Craig was prompted to relate a stirring adventure he had once met with in Canada.

"That reminds me—oddly enough," said Nat. "I have just returned from Canada, myself,—from New Brunswick—where I went to investigate some titles for a client of mine, and came across a large belt of timber land standing in your name."

"Oh, yes; Newcastle—wasn't it? I bought that prop-

erty with another man, years ago, for the sake of the riparian rights that went with it. The fishing went by the board, and we have been stranded with a useless lumber proposition ever since."

"Will you sell? My people might consider it—for a price."

"Make us an offer, and see."

"I understand the stumpage to be none of the best. You've been over it yourself?"

Craig laughed.

"No. I saw it—and in the distance—for the first and last time, the day I signed for the deed," he answered.

At this last, Nat's eyes alone betrayed the excitement he was under. Casually remarking that he would take the matter under advisement, he took the first opportunity to leave the room. When he returned, some time later, Craig was saying:

"Yes, I heard of your retirement, Judge, but nothing more. It must have been shortly after I went abroad —nearly five years since."

"I would have liked to hold on longer, if not to die in harness; but the conditions became so unbearable, I was compelled to resign. If you had been here to advise, things might have gone differently, and the rottenness—I mean the social evil—permeating the whole district, bettered. As it was, no decently honest man could remain and save his self-respect. Nor was there any apparent remedy. And by the way, Craig; I have often wondered why you did not put me wise to these iniquities, and advise me how I was being hood-winked—unless you were ignorant yourself."

"Not entirely. But I fear you may have taken it too seriously. That sort of thing cannot be prevented. It prevails everywhere, now-a-days."

"Some devil, with a larger share of brains than the rest, must have been in control. I am quite positive there existed a regular system, thoroughly organised in every ward and precinct. I wish that I had had its leader before the bar, prior to my leaving;" and the Judge ground his teeth both at the evil itself, and the recollection of the equivocal position in which he had been placed.

Craig appeared greatly concerned, offering a word or two here and there, expressive of his profound sympathy in his friend's discomfiture.

"It is an outrage," he ended. "I must look into it at once, though I doubt how far I could pick up the threads after so long an absence. However, you may remember that I once had a certain influence in that quarter—leastwise with the better element. What first brought this to your attention?"

"I became suspicious; and then Ingersoll looked up the subject for me."

"Ingersoll, did you say?" Craig asked. "Oh, yes, I remember him quite well. Yes, yes, John Ingersoll, wasn't it?" adding ironically, and after an obvious hesitation, "Well, from what I know of him, I gather you could not have made a better choice."

An awkward silence followed. The Judge frowned with unwelcome astonishment; Catherine—aghast and fearful, turned to her father, whose eyes were studying Nat as if for counsel. The latter forestalled the others.

"You must know, Mr. Craig," said he in the soft, even tones his confrères at the bar both admired and dreaded: "that Ingersoll and I have been quite close friends, and I feel that it is due to us all, and particularly to Judge Eggleston and myself, his older acquaintances, that you state what lies in your mind. I am the more concerned

about this, because there are people who have long made my friend the object of much secret suspicion.

"Yes, please speak further, Mr. Craig," interposed Mr. Rheinlander. "Both my daughter and myself would like to hear what more there is to be said. It might help to clear up some enigmas that have come to our notice, also."

Craig, still remaining silent, Nat drew up a chair, where, with his face from the light, he could best hold the other's attention. "In the first place," he began, "it is well that Mr. Ingersoll is not here. He is an extremely sensitive man;" then turning directly to Craig:

"Now will you kindly let us have it."

The other looked annoyed and replied, hesitatingly:

"Why, you give more meaning than necessary to what I said—a mere bit of gossip, about a man I never particularly fancied. So no doubt, I, humanly, gave the talk more credence than it deserved."

Then noting the tell-tale woman in Catherine's face, which had greatly attracted him, he thought he saw a chance to strike once more the man he hated, and finished:

"But there—what I especially had in mind was a report in regard to his leading a thoroughly double life. But that was years ago."

Silence followed, till the Judge demanded coldly:

"You should be more specific."

"Well," and he cast a deprecatory glance towards Catherine, "there was said to be a woman—a left handed wife, you know—whom he misused. And all the time he remained a close intimate in dear old Marston's household, as well as the constant companion of his forlorn little daughter. It struck me as rather beastly in him."

"I would not have believed it," Nat remarked. "That is the extent of what you know?"

"Except that he must have led a generally loose sort of existence, and that—so it was said—this person was of a better class.

Mr. Rheinlander's quiet voice broke in,

"When did you say this took place, Mr. Craig?"

"Oh, long ago."

"But how long since—in years, I mean?"

"Why, somewhere in the nineties—and continuing after Mr. Marston's death."

"That was away back in ninety-eight, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Nat, consulting his notebook, "the very same time that I make it. The dates correspond exactly. Strange we both got hold of the same affair!"

At this juncture, Catherine, who for some minutes had been gazing in absorbed attention at a ring worn by Craig on his watch chain, started toward him.

"How did you come by that?" she asked hoarsely, her voice scarcely above a whisper, and with trembling hand pointing to the ring worn on his watch guard. "Allow me to look at it."

Not interpreting correctly the suppressed excitement in her voice, and quickly perceiving the opportunity it gave him to change the subject, he readily unfastened the ring, and handing it to Catherine, replied:

"I've had the question put to me a great many times; which is less surprising, inasmuch as a noted collector once told me that the stone—a scarabeus, you perceive, and beautifully cut—has no duplicate. It is supposed also to carry a peculiar, sacred value in the country of its origin."

"Yes, but how did you come by it? Where did you find it?"

"That's it exactly," he answered, smiling,—"I found it."

"Found it?"

"Yes. I picked it up off the floor. Rather a curious coincidence too that you should have called attention to it after what we have just been talking about. I might have remembered this, sooner."

"Why?" harshly demanded Nat, who was closely examining the ring—his face stern, triumphant.

"Merely this. More than ten years ago I kept rented apartments in New York, subject to underlease in case of my absence. Once, returning unexpectedly from abroad, I found a woman in possession, whose departure became necessarily and unexpectedly hurried. After she had gone, I discovered this inside a glove which had fallen behind the sofa. Probably it was too large for her. As she couldn't be located I kept it, and have worn it ever since."

"Well—but the coincidence?"

"Nothing very startling," he replied with a malicious indifference—"only that the name this woman gave the landlady was, 'Mrs. John Ingersoll.' I might have politely returned it to the putative husband, or even sent it to him anonymously, I suppose. However, that may be, I didn't, you see, feel obliged to take the opportunity."

The Judge rose to his feet, in angry denunciation.

"If Jack Ingersoll has no other friends here, he can at least count on me. It's a confounded outrage for you two to go on in this way, and without a scintilla of direct proof. What's more I won't stand for it. As for you, Gibson—"

"A moment, sir. Please to glance at this before you go further and say what you might regret." Choosing

one from a bundle of papers he produced, he handed it to the other saying:

"Will you kindly read this, aloud?"

But the elder man, with ill concealed irritation, bluntly advised Nat that he might read it for himself. And without further parley, word for word, the latter read from a duly attested photograph of the original entry, the record of the marriage between Norna Boudré and John G. Ingersoll. In the oppressive stillness that followed—in an atmosphere surcharged with emotion, Nat alone remained cool and self-assured. He was the first to break the tension.

"This Norna, then, might well have been the woman to whom you were just alluding?" he suggested, addressing Craig.

"That might be so," was the studied reply. "One can never tell."

Craig was thunderstruck. His story had been prompted by the picture of the kidnapped girl claiming to be Ingersoll's wife, a statement he had found it difficult to believe. Yet here was this countryman, coming dangerously near home to himself. Moreover, how had he chanced to be in possession of this knowledge? What was the interest which had prompted him to procure the fac-simile he had shown?

Nat, however, gave him but little time for reflection, remarking, as if to himself, while again referring to his note book:

"Still another and even stronger coincidence—the date and locality precisely the same as when you bought your land!" Then looking directly at Craig:

"You more than likely met Ingersoll in Newcastle, at the time?"

"Most probably—it is quite a small place, as I recall

it. But of course I cannot speak, now, with any certainty as to that."

In the meantime the Judge had been closely examining the photograph.

"What hocus pocus is this?" he demanded indignantly, passing the print back to Nat with an expression of contempt. "That is no more Jack's signature than it is mine, and no one knows it better than yourself."

"Exactly so," was the answer, coolly given.

At this Catherine, trembling from head to foot, sprang impulsively forward.

"Let me see it—let me see it!" she cried, and would have seized the paper in her grasp, had Nat allowed it.

"Not now," he whispered very low. "Later when I have finished. Be patient, *Kate.*"

At this she looked fearlessly up at him with half opened mouth and staring eyes, her fingers gripping so tightly to his arm that the pressure made him wince.

"Then, sir, what does all this mean?" the Judge went on, paying no heed to the interruption.

"That is the one thing I have been labouring to discover,—and for ten years," said Nat. "But see, here is another exhibit to add to the collection;" and he passed a paper to Craig, together with the photograph. "Possibly you might like to compare them—especially the first name."

Their recipient turned very white, as he took in the several signatures pasted on the sheet handed him. There was no use attempting to dodge the inference suggested, as Craig plainly saw.

"I see the—illusion," he said slowly and with perfect ease—to all appearances undaunted by what confronted him, and examining the two papers critically—"for that's what it is, of course. There might be cir-

cumstances where such a resemblance would be a trifle awkward. I wonder how it is possible for two people to write so much alike. Except to myself, or to an expert, the similarity of the 'John' in the certificate to these others you seem to have been at such pains to collect, and which certainly look like mine, is startling. Indeed I should have passed the former as genuine." Here he produced a pencil, writing his name several times. "Just look! It's most remarkable! What can be the explanation?"

"It would appear that the burden of proof rested on you, sir!" the Judge thundered.

Craig looked at him with an expression of complete surprise, and then assuming a nicely adjusted irritation of manner:

"Upon my word, you cannot for a single moment go so fas as to imagine that I—I was really mixed up in this business?" he declared with a suppressed yawn, an amused, cynical smile on his face. Then shrugging his shoulders, but with no sign of being in the least perturbed, he walked slowly and deliberately to the window, saying on his return while consulting his watch:

"It bids fair, with this full moon, to be so exceptionally bright, that, if agreeable to my host, I feel tempted to take advantage of the circumstances and continue my journey to-night."

The Judge bowed, and without vouchsafing any answer summoned a servant, to whom he gave instructions to pack his guest's belongings and have them ready, with his car, at the earliest possible moment. In the pause that followed, Craig approached Catherine, at the same time extending his hand:

"If you please," he requested, "I entirely forgot about the ring."

She put the hand that held it behind her back. "You shall never touch it again," she said sternly, her voice scarcely audible; so strained and low its pitch, that but for the silence that prevailed she could not have been heard. He drew back, amazed at her words and the terrible white passion that lined her face.

"You have already admitted that it was not yours."

"I told you all I knew about it," he replied civilly.

"You mean that—literally?"

"Why, yes."

"And you kept nothing back—no secret connected with it?"

"There is none that I am aware of."

"It certainly does not belong to you, Catherine," her father advised.

In a perfectly courteous manner, but with a deprecatory gesture, Craig turned to the latter.

"I regret very much Miss Rheinlander's position," he said, "but do not see how I can rightly argue it with her. Perhaps her father may be inclined to request that what belongs to me be returned at once. The ring certainly does not belong to Miss Rheinlander. I am leaving directly, and greatly value the possession."

"You demand what belongs to you?" Catherine said, her voice at first trembling and uncertain, then gradually rising, till she stood squarely in front of him, and holding the ring before his face: "Believe me or not as you like, but this belongs to me—to me! I tell you all—it is mine, mine! It was lost long, long ago. It was lost when and where you have just described. It was I that lost it. Now see!"—and directly she had the gold band separated, and was pointing to a smaller circlet within the hollow casing. "No, look! There! That is my wedding ring which you see within the other. That

drugged and helpless woman you yourself saw—and needed no after telling—was I, myself. It was I you saw, I tell you; I, the lawful wedded wife of John Ingersoll. Thank God, thank God, I see it all!"

Swiftly her face became transfigured, and with a cry of exultant happiness she threw herself upon her father, weeping tears of joy. But only for a moment, when, tearing herself away, she sprang back at Craig, standing over him like an infuriated tigress.

"You—claim—what belongs—to you? What sort of belonging does a fiend like you merit; you who separated man and wife; you who would have made degraded slaves of two women, one your own wife; you, who having deserted your child would then have sold the mother, if she, a woman, had not whipped you instead—yes thrashed you senseless? You—you demand what belongs to you? God! If death were a fraction of your deserts, and I a man, I'd kill you where you stand!"

The other, backing step by step from his accuser, had reached the door, and was seeking to turn the handle, when Nat seized him by the wrist, jerking him down on the nearest chair in a fashion that roughly jarred him from head to foot, with:

"Stay where you're put. If you attempt to rise I'll set you back again—differently next time!"

Then addressing the Judge, who as yet comprehended but in part what had taken place, Nat handed him different manuscripts, saying:

"You will find here a memorandum of evidence to be fully established later. It will be more than sufficient to convince you how this fellow has played you double from the very beginning. It will prove how, from first to last, he has made you his cat's paw." Then with a sidewise glance at Craig, he added: "He is likewise

liable to a charge of bigamy, having a wife at the time, —and she a second venture, as I understand—when he married this Canadian woman. Amongst these papers will be found a warrant for his arrest."

"Second nothing! Bigamy? Bah! That was at a later date. Your statement is about as correct as all the rest of it," Craig exclaimed with a sneer. Then quickly realising where it led him, he savagely bit his lips.

"Good! Either way you wish. I am much obliged. I thought as much, and you make it all the easier;" and Nat grinned broadly without vouchsafing a look at the other, at the same time passing a cable despatch to the Judge.

"You will see by this message, which I received yesterday, and which is readily substantiated, that his first wife died in an English Retreat some months before this exploit in Canada. The Canadian marriage was therefore a legal one. The fact that the same autumn he was again married does not immediately concern us. The question remains, what has become of this Canadian, his lawful second wife."

"Dead probably," broke in Craig with ready assumption, "if there ever was such a person. Scarcely your business either, in any event, except as another faked-up piece of evidence to be added to the rest of these absurdities."

"Of course," he added with a shrug, "You are ready at the proper time, to be held legally responsible for this cowardly baiting. I promise you all you'll want." He sat where Nat had placed him, with assumed indifference smoking a cigarette. Yet the veins on his forehead were swelled to bursting, and he held the look of a vicious snake in the set of his lips.

"You make no denial, then?" Nat queried.

"*In toto!* Perhaps you may be lawyer enough to appreciate the fact that the so-called evidence which you have been throwing about is purely circumstantial—and most of the links missing, at that."

"Agreed to, for argument's sake—so far."

"If you have finished, perhaps I may be allowed to go?"

"Yes, whenever you like."

"I'd see you behind the bars," flared the Judge, "if no one else's name were involved."

"And that's where your goose is cooked—all of you," the other retorted with a sneer. "The alternative would have been unwholesome for me—wouldn't it, Judge?" he drawled while making for the door. "Good evening, everybody. I cannot quite make up my mind whether you really believe any of this stuff, or the whole thing is put up in order to exasperate a defenceless man. It is a highly generous proceeding, in any case! You may count on my better acknowledging that part later, and when we stand on more equal footing."

"But," he threw back, his hand resting on the door handle, "I must not forget to thank you, Judge, and most kindly, for your well-bred, old-fashioned hospitality! And tell me, how is it, and judging by your own standard—which had you rather—be a knave, or prove yourself a damned fool?"

"It were better to be either than both!" said Nat, grinning with delight as he touched a bell.

Directly the door swung open, when for the first time Craig faltered. Before him stood the figure of a woman. His easy indifference, and the assured confidence which had heretofore marked his bearing, gave place to fear and dismay. Throwing out both hands to repel her from him, he whispered through ashen lips:

"Norna!"

"Mrs. Richard Craig," Nat corrected.

The woman was clad in the habiliments of a nun, which emphasised the pallor of a face whose still remaining beauty was forgotten in its look of deeper, spiritual peace. With perfect steadiness, and apparently unstirred by any emotion unless that of sorrow, she gazed deep and pityingly into the man's eyes; then raised one hand in benediction, the other holding an ebony crucifix extended towards him, while her lips murmured a prayer. For a full minute she stood thus. Then turning away, she looked anxiously about, and uttering a glad cry, rushed towards Catherine and threw her arms about her neck.

Half an hour later Nat was speaking with Craig in the hall—a statement, prepared in advance and signed by the latter, in his pocket.

"You are therefore to bear in mind," he continued, "that you are never again to be seen or heard of in these parts. Moreover, should one breath of this story be rumoured about, I shall lay the blame at your door. You know what the consequences will be, and that the warrant you have just had the pleasure of perusing will, in either case, be served at once. You will also remember that the least of the offences charged therein is extraditable. Also, that there are constables on the premises at the present moment. No! Don't attempt any further parleying! But clear out, while you may do so with a whole skin, and lest I be further tempted to smash every bone in your miserable carcass." And roughly taking hold of his arm he walked him, dazed, stricken, and completely unnerved, out to his waiting car. There,

directing the chauffeur to start at once, he shoved him headlong in behind.

The engine's last mumbling echo was lost in the distance ere Nat returned to the study. Here, as succinctly as possible, he told the others how James had given him a handle on Craig, which on investigation led to the latter's relations with Norna, whom, three days since, he had unearthed in a convent near Quebec and arranged for her return with him.

"Oh, Nat—Nat! And you knew me all the time—you and James!" exclaimed Catherine, who on Nat's entrance had unceremoniously embraced him.

"From the very first, Kate."

"And you told—no—one? I mean—did you tell,"—she stammered, her cheeks paling.

"No one, and I am sure James did not either. I have been awfully worried, though. I had not the remotest clue to what had prompted you all along. My obligations were to you both—my duty distinctly to Jack. Now, Mr. Rheinlander—"

The latter interrupting, came forward, and gripping Nat's hand said very earnestly:

"Gibson,—Nat,—it was splendidly done! It is never to be forgotten! You have saved Catherine's happiness. God bless you," and his deep voice vibrated with suppressed feeling. Tears stood in the younger man's eyes, who replied, simply:

"I laid the foundation for the trouble, and it was up to me to get them out of it. I can't say now that I'm sorry for the first—and—I doubt if they will ever be."

"Catherine's story," Mr. Rheinlander resumed, "was undeniable—as far as it went. At the same time I never doubted Ingersoll, not for a moment. I could not if I

had wanted to. His antecedents, his present life, forbade it. I knew him. He was of a different type. The evidence against him was staggering—it was not, however, conclusive. Some one had impersonated him. I was sure of that. But who? And who could prove it? The answer reduced itself to Norna. Years had elapsed. The human hive had completely changed in the haunts where Norna once lived in New York. My investigations were endless. But the report always came back that she could not be found—was probably dead."

"I discovered her by the merest accident."

"Well, perhaps. But you found her. Then came a rift in the cloud. *Ingersoll was not in New York at the time alleged.* Passenger lists of two separate lines proved that. He did not land till three days later—not if the records were true. The miserable structure to his discredit thus fell to pieces—at least to my mind."

"But why, oh, why didn't you—"

"Be patient, dear," he answered Catherine, who was staring at him aghast. "I might have told you at once. It was hard not to. But I deemed it wiser not. It would not have absolutely convinced you. It might have raised false hopes. There was still much to be accounted for. Pointedly Jack's presence at Newcastle at the time of the marriage. Remember Craig's startling description of his third wife—a strange coincidence! You would think of these things sometimes. It would be humanly impossible not to. No, the identity of the right man must be sought further—must be established."

"Father, Father, I cannot bear it—to think—what I have done!" and she buried her face in a passion of weeping.

Gently he stroked her hair, while continuing in a low voice, so that she alone might hear:

"But beyond all this was a far more vital consideration. You had not seen him, Catherine, since you were a child. For long years you harboured a continuously increasing loathing and hate. Now you were differently circumstanced; with a different point of view, a more completely developed character. To my mind, the crucial point was that you should admit to yourself that, whether he was guilty or innocent beyond peradventure, you loved this man—your husband—for what he is today. On this my hopes for your happiness centred. On this I relied. And then you met him again. Directly I bought the Grange, and did my best to throw you together. Despite it all, against your will, the past became buried in that love which is invulnerable."

"But what of—if—" she barely articulated.

"Have no fear, dear. On that one point, I am sure I do appreciate Jack," he answered with a smile.

With one explanation and another, it was some time before a comprehensive understanding was obtained by the others in this drama, the bitterness of which had clouded their lives. Through it all the Judge showed himself in fine fettle, and was so exuberant at the final outcome, so intoxicated with delight that the lost had been found, as to forget for the time being both his mortification, his wrath, and his dignity, and he capered about more like an overgrown boy than an elderly justice of distinguished reputation. The only exceptions to this were when Craig's name was directly mentioned, or Nat embarrassed him with covert allusions to the moral atmosphere by which he had allowed his official life to be circumscribed.

At last, Catherine's trembling hands, her flushed face, her glowing eyes, warned her father that she must get away to the greater quietude of her own home. So the

carriage—returned to the Grange earlier in the evening —was again sent for, Norna agreeing to accompany them back.

Soon the crunch of wheels was heard and in a moment as the door opened Wolfine rushed in to greet Catherine. She turned from one to another of her old friends, but became every second more and more restless and uneasy in her motions, doubtfully sniffing here and there. Suddenly, and sharply, she stood still in her tracks, alternately drawing in and emitting long deep breaths through her dilated nostrils, the while turning her head with pleading, puzzled inquiry towards Catherine. Then quickly, with nose in air and shivering with intense excitement, she stepped slowly forward, till coming to where their coats had hung, she halted. Again the exhalations, shorter, quicker now. With a low rumble in her throat, she cautiously pushed against the door, and entered the study. Then directly, a snarl—savage, blood-curdling. The others following found her, the risen hair straight and rigid along her back, ripping to shreds a handkerchief. When no remnant was left to rend, she made rapidly about the room; then rushed to the stairs, tearing through the house, heedless of Catherine's cries, and reckless of what stood in her way.

Soon she was back again to spring outside and traverse here and there; the while whining, softly, and ever more and more eagerly—till with one long wail, she laid her long body to the earth, and silent as a ghost flashed out of sight. The others looked at each other aghast, the same thought in the minds of each.

"She has not forgotten," cried Catherine, in horror. "She'll tear him to pieces."

"You need have no fear of that," said Nat. "He has

more than an hour's lead, and the dog can never catch up with him."

"He's well entitled to whatever happens to him," said her father, adding anxiously; "But of the two, it's the dog I would be the more anxious about. You have never seen him shoot. I have. He never misses."

"Sometimes he may," Nat suggested, with a pleased chuckle.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DOG AND THE MAN

MANY, many generations ago, in those hazardous times when Erin's Isle was ruled by petty kings, when brute force and the power of gold dominated Church and State, and to read and write was reckoned but a clerkly trait,—the Irish Wolf Hound was overall better considered and better housed than the serfs and common folk who fought and bled in upholding the petty quarrels of their feudal Lords. The fierce, savage brutes stood between all men, whether rich or poor, and the hordes of scavenging wolves that depleted and terrorised the land—north and south, from Belfast's bogs to Sligo's sea.

And in the blue veins of Wolfine, whose pedigree was recorded on parchment sheet, ran untainted the hot blood which marked her race. Despite the evolution of time, her schooling and gentle love for Kate, she now harked back to the reckless passion and savage hate which were hers by inherited right—to the longing for revenge, and the lust for blood.

And being nothing but a soulless dog, whose animal instincts, according to human dictum, alone defined and limited her acts, she had but one longing at her heart as she sped on and on through the clear June night, one overmastering impulse, one goal ahead—to tear at the throat of Richard Craig.

With easy, steady stride she passed through the village, then shortly picked her course, and with assured,

far-reaching, long enduring spring held her onward way, up hill and down, gathering in the miles one by one; never slackening, never hastening her measured pace. A single vision was ever present to her thought—the vile attack, the gruelling blows, the last expiring sob of her foster child. Time had not obscured the smallest incident of that tragedy, nor made the zest for vengeance one whit the less. Vividly she recalled the cruel weapon, rising, falling,—as if but yesterday. The twelve years had served only to strengthen the thirst for murder in her heart. The kindlier human influences by which she had been encompassed, her intimate association with devoted friends, her affection for her mistress, her own kindly temperament, one and all were lost, and in their stead raged the spirit of the were-wolf.

And thus beneath the bright shimmer of the moonlight, now approaching its fulness, she kept steadily on; her pace slower than the game she sought, but her keen hearing alive to every sound; her dog's gifts matched against a mechanism which could not tire, which would not halt unless by design or accident.

For thirty miles or more, the highway followed a straight course westward, when the road divided. From thence, one fork continued to the left, and the other, after rounding a long widening curve, trended easterly and sharply back through a valley parallel to that where Dorset lay—the two separated by a trackless range of mountainous forest some ten miles or more in width. Long before reaching this division the dog stopped, and, sitting on her haunches, listened with the utmost intentness, alive to every slightest sound that broke the oppressive quiet of the night. From time to time her ears twitched in recognition, as the mellow whistle of a moose bird, the liquid scaling of a peabody, or

the indignant scold of a red squirrel broke the silence. But she never moved. Nor did head nor body relax their tenseness, till far to the north and west broke the uncanny yell of a screech owl, untimely disturbed in its lone domain.

Slightly swaying her head in the direction of the sound, the dog became, if possible, more rigid, more like a sculptured image than before. Save for the sudden light blazing up in her eyes, she might not have noticed it.

Again the shrill lament—more emphatic than before. At once, now fully conscious of the cause that gave it birth, the dog shook herself, stretched her powerful supple body as an athlete tightens his belt when time is called, and with snout pointed skyward, twice gave the long, continued, summoning note of her wolfish sires. Then directly, and with noiseless tread, she disappeared in the tangle on her right.

Soon she was running easily along the crest of a ledge crowned with beech, varied maples, mountain ash and birches—with ground hemlock, squaw and moose bush spread beneath—the but partially expanded foliage, not yet blanketing the moon gradually rising higher and higher in the heavens. From out the soft sodden leaves resting on the mould of centuries, and struggling through carpets of white crinkled caribou and staghorn mosses, peeped colonies of wintergreen and arbutus, with triple-leaved cornel. Beds of partridge vine, sprouting their cream white lilac-scented blossoms, covered the ground. Occasionally, through patches of late remaining snow, rose pale-leaved wood anemones, heralds of the wind, with fuzzy-furred hepatica for neighbours—all cleanly odourous and exhilarating in their vernal freshness; all born together in that northern spring.

Higher and higher the dog climbed, till, from a bed of dwarfed fir and spruce, she broke cover and forced her way through thickly growing bushes, and then past boulders, and over rock and shale which clanked noisily in the lonely, peaceful night. A frightened deer crossed her path with defiant whistling snort. Several times she scented a fox hard by. But to none of them did she give the slightest heed. Once only did she hesitate, and then swerved deftly away; nor did she stop further to consider the huge, black, clumsy ball, which, glinting out of its little piggish eyes, cried like a fretful whining baby, its barbed quills bristling on every side.

On the shoulder of the mountain, the dog again halted, listening with straining ears. Once more she gave the long drawn wail in response to what she heard.

From the mountain's base the course led through boggy swamps of cedar, where the dog glided in, and out, and over the inextricable tangle of swamp, of rotten wood and fallen timber—the air redolent with miasmic, acrid, pungent juices. At last, emerging on an open barren of mixed marsh and fen, she ploughed her way —ofttimes sinking to her girth—ever straight and true through the spongy red makoke, and between stunted tamaricks whose moss bearded branches loomed weirdly grey and ghostlike in the desolate waste. Finally she reached more open country, in scattered areas cleared and tilled by man. Here she gave freer rein to the speed she had hitherto been forced to hold in check; now racing over fresh velvety grass, now midst clusters of dainty starlets of housatonia.

Thus through this northern night in early June, when forest and hill, from valley to mountain top, lay still and restful beneath the glorious fulness of the spring, the dog kept on, impelled by one concentrated, cherished longing

born of vindictive hate. Now veritably a primordial beast, gloating in the full assurance that her opportunity had come, that her long sought prey was near at last.

Later, the mists of earliest morn gradually settling upon the lowlands, dimmed the long scarps of the meadow violets sprouting in the open, distorting bush and shrub into phantom shapes. Still the dog went undeviatingly on and on. In time she approached the highway, at a place where the road flanked a swollen stream filled with thousands on thousands of driving, swirling logs. Here in a belt of low, sparsely scattered pines, her gaunt form motionless like an apparition in the mist, she halted, waiting for the man, whom she—by force of instinct merely—knew must pass that way; waiting for one whose kind deny that hers possess a mind, or forceful reasoning power.

Soon came a distant thrum. Then, as a pair of blazing lights swept through the fog, the dog shrank back till hidden in the scrub, her wiry coat bristling high along her spine, her baleful eyes flaming red, her mighty frame trembling in eager passion to rend and tear. Once more, with froth dripping jowl and angry snarl, she curled back her lips to bare the sharp-pointed vicious fangs. Once more she sounded that long melancholy signal, the death slogan of her race. So close, so strangely sudden and uncanny was the cry, that the car swerving, shied like a frightened bird, zigzagging from side to side. Then the driver, regaining his control, with a jerk forced it to its topmost speed, violently pitching forward the man behind. To him, weary, hungry, and startled in his sleep, the threatening wail again repeated, came like a final summons, cutting short the blasphemy on his tongue, and striking his embittered mind and guilty soul with terror. Angry with himself,

for the fright it gave him, he shouted imprecations at the gruesome thing, whose shadow he but faintly saw, cursing it for the ill-mannered beast it was. Then as the car flashed on, all was once more quiet, save for the engine's steady, untiring throb, and occasionally a low sharp bark, trailing ever more and more remotely to the rear. But when the dawn had fairly broken, and the mists encouraged by a gentle breeze began to fade away, the road, on reaching the lower levels of the valley, grew rough and hard of travel, and where the shade was deepest it became a bed of sorted puddles, and littered with mud and stone forced upwards by the escaping frost. Through miles of this the car staggered on, the man now gradually losing ground. The pursuing shadow was soon abreast, though scarcely to be seen, and visible only here and there as she swept through the adjoining coverts, her eye ever on the single figure and the dull blue steel he held within his hand.

A grim expression now rested on the face of the man, who, less afraid, and supremely confident in his proven skill, waited for the chance when he might rightly see, and place, and kill this vagrant wolf who dared to challenge him on the broad highway. Suddenly two shots rang out, so quickly in succession they could have passed as one. Yet the dog never faltered in her track, if swerving deeper through the bush.

The man, with a look of surprise and something of self disgust, turned to replenish the emptied chambers, —but hunted in vain for what he sought. Once more he fired, and then again. Both times he aimed with utmost care,—but so far as he could tell, no more successfully than at first. Disappointed, astonished, and muttering angrily to himself, he repeatedly threw the

revolver up, then down into position, testing the accurate quickness of his eye on different objects—unable to fathom the reason why his certain skill had failed so utterly. All at once something in the balance did not quite respond to his practised hand. This led him to break the chambers open, and draw out the last remaining charge. One sharp glance, and with a vile oath, he hurled the weapon towards the lithe shape dodging in and out amongst the trees. Then he set to cursing the fellow whose shrewd foresight had extracted the lead, and covered the powder with a wad of putty.

Chagrined, and in a passion, he swore furiously at the bewildered driver; berating him fiercely for the fear he evidenced at sight of a cowardly wolf, whose kind seldom need be feared when single and alone.

Soon the road began to improve slightly; whereat the man settled back again in his place, to commune with his evil self on the happenings of the night. He grit his teeth when he thought of how this despicable countryman had first outwitted and driven him to the wall, had humiliated him, and then made sport of him by this final trick. With the recollection of Norna, he bit his lips till they bled,—at the fatality and mortification of it all, as well as at the stupid infatuation which had carried him off his balance. Audibly he cursed the folly which had betrayed him into an actual fool marriage. What beastly luck was his, that his plans should so miscarry! Why had he not shipped her off long before? Why had he dallied in his purpose? What a mess he had made of the whole business from the very beginning! He had supposed the woman dead and buried; and if not, that she would certainly never cross his path again. And here she was, posing as his law-

ful wife—with all the claims and rights that went therewith!

Absorbed with these reflections, he ceased to give further thought to his pursuer, who had lagged behind to sniff the missile he had thrown away. Then all at once, and close to, broke a clamorous baying, growing deeper, full-throated and continuous, as the dog, her speed gathering at every stride, came up from behind and raced beside the car. At the first glance the man started back. Then timorously he looked again. And as his gaze rested on the foam-flecked, teeth bared shape below—when he saw the burning, implacable, bloodshot eyes blazing at him with concentrated, vengeful hate—then at once, and with terror stricken gasp, he recognised the wolf for dog—and knew her for Wolfine.

Horror, and fear drove the blood surging back on his heart, brain and body for a moment paralysed by this final blow of treacherous fate. He crouched down in the bottom of the tonneau, nerveless, fearing to raise his head, with the cold sweat beading on his forehead. The car, jumping madly forward as the terrified driver opened the throttle wide, began climbing up the uneven road with reckless speed. The dog, still giving tongue while the game remained in view, vainly strove with her mighty stride to keep the pace. Not till she was lost to view, and her cry no more than a distant yelp, did the man slowly raise himself, an ugly sneer on his face, though trembling still and casting many a furtive look behind. Then, just as the sun broke on the eastern slope where hill and valley met, a loud report signalled disaster. With bursted tire the car went bumping and skidding along the wet uneven road.

The race was over. The baying in the rear soon signalled that the quarry was once more in sight. The

unstrung, agonised man knew that his relentless foe would never yield; that it was but a question of minutes and then— There was nothing he could do—weaponless and at the brute's mercy; nothing which might avail to save him; nothing to put him beyond her reach.

With a supreme effort he pulled himself together, till by degrees his lost courage somewhat rose, and then his temper. No; he would not lie supinely down, to be torn to rags, and without a struggle. Wondering how far his driver could be depended on, he cast about for a stick, or broken branch, or anything that might serve him as a club, but could find nothing to his purpose.

Meanwhile, the baying of the hound was drawing nearer, and ever sharper and more exulting.

And now the motor, jostling along, swung round a sharp curve facing a long descent, and the dog, well to the rear, was hidden from sight. On the right, several hundred yards from the road, and separated from it by a stretch of sloping swale littered with burned and fallen trees, lay the river—its surface nearly concealed by a solid raft of timber edging towards a vortex, where the logs, jammed into an inextricable mass, were packed high and tightly wedged. On the further side of the open water below, two long lean-tos were stretched on either side of the remnants of a loggers' fire, its embers now smouldering in the crisp, clean morning air. Scattered about were gangs of river men, preparing for their dangerous task—with peevie and hand-dog to wrestle with the congested logs and break the jam.

The man, grasping his opportunity, harshly gave instructions to the driver, who at once slowing up the machine, drew towards the side of the road. A moment later the car was again floundering on, and the man lay crouching within the shelter of the bushes, waiting till

his enemy, lured on by the deceit, had passed him by. Then rising, he fled with all his might—running, jumping, crawling over fallen trunks and beds of broken rock, through tangled deadfalls and thorny bush; assured of the help and safety that lay with his fellow men. But when scarcely two score of yards remained between him and the water's edge—and that through open ground—piercing above the roar of waters and groaning, creaking logs, came an anguished shout from the man echoing a more triumphant note that told the dog had found the trail, and was coming sure and fast.

Several men beyond the clear water dropped their tools and sought to launch a skiff. Others rallied to defend the man when the chase should reach their side; some seizing axes, others with brandished pikes marshalling a solid front—one and all arrayed against this monstrous wolf. The shore was won, yet the man shrank from the plunge, fearing to tempt the swim across. Despite the warning yelled from a dozen throats, he ran straight to where the jam bridged the stream, and headed for the camp, jumping and climbing from log to log. One half the distance was won, as he leaped an open space and reached a raft of tangled timbers, there to discover that it was isolated from the rest and all further progress barred. Driven into a corner, he crept to the furthest end of his strange islet, craven fear gripping his soul, his face as blanched as the death he feared. Then, near to his hand, he suddenly spied a floating stick, heavy and well fashioned for a club. This he eagerly grasped at and managed to secure, and rising to his feet uplifted it with both his hands. Cursing, he stood boldly by the water's edge and waited for the dog, now at the bank and following hotly on his trail. He saw his single chance. He would strike her in mid air, and before

she landed by his side. He dare not think of failure.

As he watched her coming, he could see her better in the clearer sunshine, more distinctly than he had through the broken light of dawn, and when the fog lay heavy. His blood ran cold and shivering at the sight. Slowly, steadily, the dog was feeling her way, testing every spar before she bore her weight; her active, supple body, winding in and out among the confused heaps of logs with cautious, gingerly step. A white, dripping froth lathered her chest and trickled to her feet, while her long wicked teeth clunked and snapped with the champing of her jaws. Never for a single instant did the wild, reddened eyes, glaring in savage fury, wander from the man's face. The debt of hatred, so long nursed and rankling in her breast, was about to be wiped out. Vengeance for her foster child was to be hers at last.

And while the man waited, every nerve and muscle strung to its highest pitch, the opening gradually widened, till thirty feet or more lay between him and where the dog must spring. Seeing which, he reviled her coming with goading laughter. He knew that her leap must fall short before she reached him. He was sure no living thing could span so great a space. No mortal man nor dog. And then like a flash there came to his disordered mind the memory of Nat's words, and he wondered if this might be no living beast, but the unlaid ghost of what Wolfine had been. Stronger and more convincing the idea prevailed against his better sense, controlling his unbalanced superstitious soul. At last, it palsied his faltering will and self-command, and he recoiled from the raging spirit, now crouching directly opposite and about to tempt the open space that lay between them.

With a frenzied scream he let drop the club, and rush-

ing to the furthest end of a single log that overtopped the stream, dived headlong in its waters. At once the leverage of his weight at that particular point unlocked the entire mass, which, at first groaning, trembling, hesitating, suddenly disintegrated, and with deafening roar released the accumulated waters from above, converting the river into a tossing flood of somersaulting logs.

But with ready appreciation and surpassing agility, the dog had sprung back from out the crumble, and made the shore in safety. Directly beyond from where she stood, and in plain view, tossing like a ball hither and thither amidst the swirling tumultuous sea, was her lifelong foe, dodging the heavy logs while tortured by the certain doom that he was powerless to avert. The dog's revenge lay with a mightier power, and secure herself, she could watch it when it came.

Beyond, stood spellbound a group of ablebodied men, every one of them versed and skilled in river craft. Scarcely one but could keep his balance standing on a single log revolving in the stream, or ride a pair and keep them close together in the swiftest currents. Yet every man hesitated, temporised, waiting irresolute and with bated breath, uncertain what to do. Not one ventured to challenge those choked and foaming waters—not even to save a fellow man.

But a complete change had come over the whole appearance of Wolfine. No longer flashed the cruel teeth. No more a man-hunting, mad were-wolf—rabid, eager to tear and harry. No longer the untamable, infuriate, obsessed with a lust to kill. With the breaking of the dam and the loosening of its pent up waters, the mighty spirit of the dog triumphed. An impulse more glorious than her splendid strength inspired and led her.

And the man? Cut off from the refuge he sought,

abandoned by his kind, he fought madly in an eddying stretch whither the current swept him; drifting, twirling, hopeless of succour; seeking to dodge the racking, pounding death threatening on every side. Once he vanished beneath the surface, his cry of despair but faintly heard above the chaos. Seeing and hearing which the dog whined, then barked sharply and continuously, moving with restless gait to and fro, eagerly watching till the man's head at last rose bobbing to the surface. Once more he disappeared. Therewith, the dog, coming to the water's very edge, stood silently with one fore-foot raised, gazing fixedly at the spot, motionless and rigid save for an intense quivering of her great frame; her head extended forward—as setters mark the scented bird. Her jaws were now tightly closed, but the lips no longer wrinkled back. Her eyes still glared—but with altered impulse and intent. Her heart was impelled with other purpose than the lust to kill.

Once more the man came in view, clinging frantically to a spar separated from the hurtling crush. Like a streak of flame the dog was in the water, beating her dangerous way, the long sought foe within her grasp could she but hold her own.

The man saw the lordly head ploughing towards him. Cringing, with shriek on shriek, he invoked a human help that did not come. And when the dog reached him, crazed with terror he began blindly and with all his strength to hammer her head and face, savagely raining blow on blow from his disincumbered arm. Unflinchingly the dog bore it all, taking the punishment she could neither dodge nor parry. At last she was able to seize him by the collar, when deftly twisting him over on his back, she headed for the shore with him in tow. At once the man lay still and unresisting; whenever the

choking water allowed, singing softly to himself, or boisterously shouting at highest pitch with maniac laughter.

Desperate was the chance that either made the land. Twice, both beast and burden were submerged. Then, just as they neared the bank, the dog was heavily struck and broke her hold. Here the man found footing in the shallower water, and still incoherently gibbering, stumbled ashore. Once more, exhausted as he was, he sought in vain to drown the dog, pelting her with rocks, the heaviest he could find and lift. But when she had reached the bank and came toward him, he fell on his knees—coaxing, praying, wheedling, weeping, laughing, yelling as before.

At this moment from across the flood, and clearly to be heard above its din, came the chorus of two score of human throats, cheering the gallant deed. With cocked ears the dog raised her head—doubtfully, questioningly. She then turned towards the man, now grovelling forward on his knees with childish prayers and mutterings. For a moment she stared at him, till, with an expression of revulsion and abhorrence, she shivered and shrank away, backing as from a soiled and unclean thing whenever he drew closer. At last, her face and pose betokening her contemptuous wonder and loathing, she gave him one long, final look. Then seemingly ashamed of the rescue she had made, with crest lowered and tail drawn tight within her legs, she whimpered sullenly, and turning slowly about, bent her homeward way.

The route was long and trying, and soon she found it desperate. The easy lissome spring, the princely strides, the matchless power and enduring strength, began to weaken. The dainty, sure, and softly going tread were hers no more. The splendid frame swayed drunk-

enly from side to side. Nevertheless, onward, foot by foot, mile by mile, spent and sick she wearied along. With splintered ribs lacerating her lungs at every step, she strove with all her mighty heart to reach her goal, to carry out her last remaining hope.

There was one spot she longed to attain. One single place, which, despite the sickening hurt, she yet must reach, to die happily and content. Towards this goal, with concentrated longing and purpose, she laboured on. At times she could scarcely draw the wheezing, soughing breath which fought to choke and smother out her life; which, at every intake stabbed her with sharply agonizing pains. Time and again she halted by some colder mountain spring, and lying in its waters cooled her swollen, fevered side. More than once the drowsiness that knows no wakening fell upon her. But she beat it off. Her great strength was slowly weakening —yet she would not yield. The heart within her, dog that she was, was still the heart of Wolfine! Full well she knew that her course was run. But she longed for the presence, the sympathy, the voice she loved so well. They beckoned her ever on and on through swamp and forest, over stream and mountain top, by path and road. Creeping under deadfalls she could no longer climb or span, toiling through trackless thickets of bush and briar, her flagging, ebbing life sustained by a mighty craving, she crept within the grounds and past the portals of the Grange, to bid with glazing eyes a last farewell, and whining softly, peacefully, happily, lay her grizzled head beneath the caress of her loved one's hand.

CHAPTER XXII

AN INVITATION

"OLD man, you look as fit as ever I saw you," Nat remarked, addressing Jack, who, just landed from the steamer, was seated opposite him at breakfast.

"You are right there," the other replied "I came across a sociable Englishman,—scarce, I admit, but the real article when you once uncover him. We spent three weeks together doing the north of Scotland, a-foot. Lots of exercise, simple food, and no end of fog. I'm as hard as nails, and never felt better. You may expect me back in harness, to-morrow. How is everything?"

Nat looked him over, a quizzical look on his face. "I guess you are in for all the harness you want," he replied in an absent minded way, at the same time fumbling in his pocket. "Here, you ought to have had this before," and he handed him a letter. "You see it is marked 'immediate'—and was sent to my care. I opened and read it under your general instructions without at first realising its privacy." Saying which, he turned to speak with some one at an adjoining table, while Jack read:

"The Grange,
"June 14/12.

"*Dear Mr. Ingersoll:*

"You will remember how you pledged me your word to come to me at once, whenever I so requested. I am sure you will keep that promise. May I expect you

therefore on the 15th, and by the morning train? Father's yacht—that beautiful *Isis* we had in the Mediterranean—is in full commission, and I hope we shall go aboard a day or two after you arrive. So the time is short. But I shall wait for you, here.

"I am very joyful nowadays and you must share it with me.

"Faithfully yours,

"CATHERINE RHEINLANDER.

"I implore you not to disappoint me."

Jack gasped. He had been putting up a pretty stiff fight with himself the last month or more; and now what little headway he had made bid fair to be scattered to the winds. He knew that this would certainly take place at the first sight of Catherine, if he might judge by the immediate effect produced by the simple note in his hand. And yet he must go. There was no way out of it—even if he desired to find an excuse. And this latter he well knew not to be the case, realising that at heart he was ready to forfeit almost anything for the sake of hearing her voice and seeing her once more. Nat broke in on his reflections.

"From our fair client—I understand?"

"Yes."

"Well," the other exclaimed; "she does not propose to let the grass grow, does she?" and he grinned with satisfaction."

Receiving no reply, he added:

"So you're in for it—*nolens volens?* And I'm right glad she is so happy! Now the first thing for you to do is to honour her summons, and then—then—" and he shrugged his shoulders, evidently much amused. "Well, you know, Jack, that you ought to have borne in mind

that these simon pure, platonic friendships, are likely to raise the devil. But you are certain to go?"

"Yes, I shall go," the other replied curtly, surveying his friend with ominous contempt. Then consulting his watch, he was about to rise when Nat detained him.

"Jack," he said, soberly now; "I know you think me a rough brute, and that you have a right to be utterly disgruntled—but take it fair and foul, you haven't."

"No?"

"Not in the least. This affair has brought forgetfulness of other things, if nothing else.

"And by the way," he added dryly, "you had better pack up all your newest and best, so as to make yourself look as pretty—as possible. Take enough to last—well, anywhere from a couple of days to—to—six weeks, we'll say. That's about orthodox, I believe. Remember later, how I told you! And good luck to you both."

CHAPTER XXIII

CHILDREN ONCE MORE

"OH, I am so glad to see you!" was Catherine's greeting; and despite a certain shyness in her demeanour, her voice carried an eager welcome.

"And what an unforeseen honour to have you meet me yourself," was Jack's response, laughing and shaking hands with her.

"Not for such a word-abiding man as you have proved yourself to be," she answered easily, while leaning down from the box seat on which she was perched; though his wildest dreams would never have imagined the control she was putting on herself. "Now you are to come straight to the Grange, bag and baggage. It's all arranged for. I will allow nothing else—nor will father either. So give up your check and we will be going. These beasts are perfectly crazy for exercise, and, if you like, we'll give them a chance to work some of it off before lunch. What do you say—and we'll have a beautiful time? Good! I knew you'd love it. You may find it pretty narrow quarters, but clamber up beside me, quick—or they will wrench my wrist to pieces! We're off!"

The high-strung powerful roadsters jumped to the traces, and soon they were out of the village and driving up the valley. On one side lay the river, glimmering in the June sunshine. On the other, low green meadows, margining the fresh pasture lands, which, like roll-

ing billows rising higher and higher, were dotted to the farthest reaches with sheep and cattle as on a thousand hills. Not till Catherine had the horses well in hand, and they were settled down to the work before them, did either speak. This had given her companion time to collect his thoughts, and to recover from the unwonted awkwardness that seemed to possess him. It also made the opportunity to watch the masterly skill with which she handled the reins; her face flushed, and her eyes afire with an excitement which he rightly attributed to the task she had in hand—though mistaking what that task was. She had, too, the art, which few women possess in its entirety, of being always perfectly dressed, if simply to the untutored eye. But never before had he seen her more bewitchingly clad. The graceful, perfect figure had never appeared so rarely modelled; nor the proud, shapely head, gold flicked by the sunbeams, so exquisitely charming.

"There!" she exclaimed, relaxing her hold when part way up a steep hill. "Now tell me, my hero of the Refuge, all about yourself. First, how you came out of it all, and then about your jaunt abroad."

"Better than ever. I was merely forced to take a little rest. I reckon I was more dead tired than anything else—physically and mentally. It gave me a dandy excuse, too, to play truant, and I improved on it," he answered; and then went on to describe his trip, and relate what a good time he had.

"And hazarded no battle for some Scotch lassie—whether of high or low degree?" she exclaimed when he had finished. "Pray, what has my knight errant been dreaming about?"

"Only an occasional rescue, here and there," he laughed. "As to my thoughts, a fertile imagination

might readily guess that I was fighting most of the time to forget one bonniest maid,—she whom I left behind me. It might have annoyed you, however."

"Yes, it would have, indeed," she retorted. "I should have greened like the grass of the field, had I ever suspected such a thing."

"But how about Wolfine?" he asked suddenly. "If I hadn't known her for the toughest of living things, I should have worried over how she came out of our blizzard scrape. What a wonder she is! It was after all, distinctly her courage, strength, and intelligence that won out for us."

Her hands faltered in their grasp as she caught her breath. Then partly turning away her head, and saying that she had no reason to believe that the exposure had injured the dog, she became suddenly busy in regathering the reins.

"Tell me," Jack asked later, "what your plans are, and where you mean to cruise, and for how long?"

"Oh, wherever the spirit moves us; and just as long—as long as we—we both please. You see there will only be two of us," she finished demurely.

"What a jolly, wonderful time you have before you."

"I hope so. I expect, oh, I know it will be heaven," she answered very softly. Yet he was impressed by her earnestness, and was at a loss to understand the colour that flooded her face, or the smile that played on her lips as she leaned towards him.

"How you must be looking forward to it—you and your father. Think of it! Now if you had only invited me, too, I might have helped liven things up a bit—on a stormy day."

"And you would love it?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"Love it? I can't conceive anything more absolutely perfect. But I wasn't bidding for an invitation. I'm booked for the grindstone after my play, and really I am glad of it. You wrote about being so joyful now-a-days, and suggested my sharing some morsel of it. What's it all about, and where may I come in? Or, do I really come in at all?"

She looked at him shyly for a second; then said, the tenderest of smiles on her lips:

"We will see about that, later. These horses are about all I can manage at present."

"And so it's a question of management, is it?"

"Most likely—in a way," she answered merrily. "But come—I have challenged fate to make your visit as enchanting as I know how. It was so very nice of you to come. So watch me, and see how hard I try."

Which order Jack implicitly obeyed; finding it nothing more than what he had long been accustomed to do, during every moment he passed in her company. And this was where his main difficulty lay according to his way of thinking; and where he argued he was, to say the least, making a fool of himself.

As for her, she proved herself as good as her word; for casting away that reserve whose veil he had never been able rightly to penetrate or understand, she strove to enthrall his heart by the endearment that lay in her voice and beneath her spoken words. She felt, she knew her power. But she laboured with mind and soul for such success as no later developments would be able to impair. She craved so much more than forgiveness. Her whole being demanded the old Jack, and nothing less. Yet, no one to have seen the merry, happy smile on her face as they drew up at the Grange, would have for a moment suspected the dread of what was coming that lay

so heavy on her heart; nor the haunting shadow—unadmitted, but ever there, and which she could not shake off—of what its effect might be on the husband she had injured.

As for Jack, he felt every resolution, every link in his armour going. The past, his errant wife, the long humiliating anxious years, as well as his sense of the fitness of things, were being swept aside under an irresistible charm, which completely enchained him. He refused to allow his mind to dwell on what the aftermath might be.

When they arrived at the Grange, it seemed odd to him that the man servant, who stood ready at the door, gave greeting with such a pronounced grin of proprietary welcome beneath his tutored complaisance. But as this had followed a hearty "God bless you, sir," from James, whom they passed on the avenue, he concluded that it was merely an earnest of how his hostess was striving to keep her word.

"Lunch will be served in about twenty minutes," Catherine said, as they proceeded towards the library. At the same moment, stopping abruptly before a door opening off the hall, she added, with averted face: "The upper chambers, all except father's,—who, by the way, has not yet come back from New York—are terribly in arrears. So I had this room arranged for you, and your things brought here. It is part of my suite to be sure, but there is a lock to this door between us. So you need have no apprehension of missing anything!"

"I should have more fear of upsetting things," he replied, laughing, after taking in the dainty appointments of the room; and then both continued on towards the annex.

"I expect to depart to-morrow, or possibly the day after," Catherine told him later. "In fact, our whole household will have left in a day or two."

"You mean to go aboard the yacht, at once, then? Why not let us go on to New York together—that is if I may stay over?"

"It would break my heart if you did not do both," she assented sedately, though turning away from him lest he note the hot flame burning on her cheeks.

"Thanks—and what time do you expect Mr. Rheinlander?"

"Not till the afternoon—anyway."

"Then he cannot get here much before dinner time. But, tell me, where is Wolfine?"

"I have dreaded your asking that. I could not bring myself to pain you by telling you on our drive," she replied, her voice very low. "Wolfine has left us, Mr. Ingersoll."

The tears would spring to Jack's eyes; for, until Catherine came, the dog had been not only his faithful friend and near companion for many years, but she was closely identified in his mind with the two women who had dramatised his life. Her death was a great shock to him. He had little conception how doubly comprehensive was its meaning to the woman by his side.

"It was in the fulness of time," she added. "It happened also in a noble cause,—worthy of Wolfine. Later I will tell you more. I cannot now;" and she was unable to check the sobbing that overcame her.

He stepped forward. "I understand something of what this is to you," he said very gently. "Don't cry, sweetheart. I am so sorry for you. You shall tell me all about it, some future day."

"Thank you," she replied in a choked voice; and re-

leasing the hand he had taken she immediately retired to her room.

When later they sat down to lunch, she had regained the cheerful, happy look that had been with her before.

"I have unearthed an old left-over," she said, as they rose from the table—"two in fact, a horse and a wagon. What do you say to passing the afternoon puttering in and out among the wood roads?"

And he, readily assenting, they went later to the barn, where, at her direction he caught and led from the adjoining paddock an antedated relic, once mottled grey, now very white. Catherine motioned Jack to the off side; and then together they harnessed the old horse to a time-worn cart, she doing her share in full, and both as if from accustomed habit carrying out appointed parts. But the beast proved very restless, especially when, one on either side, they came to adjust the traces.

"Funny old creature, isn't it?" Catherine remarked.

Directly she was overcome with laughter, as an uncalled for swish of the tail took Jack fair across his head and face,—being precisely what she looked for.

"Darned old fool, I should say!" he blurted hotly, picking up his hat. "He always was, too!"

"What, you remember him? What a joke!"

"Remember him? I've hitched him a hundred times before, but forgot that trick of his." Then catching her eye, he had to join her in her mirth—as he had been forced to do on many like occasions, years ago.

Soon they were amid deep, shade-giving woods, and bumping painfully along the old logging road leading to the rapids. Once she threw him the reins, and jumping out before the horse had fully stopped, gathered a bunch of Cypripediums growing within the deep, rocky, sandy woods.

"Oh, I love them so," she said, putting them to her face to inhale their hearty fragrance. "Don't you?"

"Yes—I like them," he answered. But she knew what caused the halting in his speech, and that the flower brought to his mind the memory of a child whose favourite it had been.

Later they crossed the brook at the old picnic ground; a spot which Jack had always consistently avoided in their walks. Here she dismounted and hitched the horse to a tree, declining his help.

"I thought we might wander here, or to some such place," she told him. "Now, just see what a good fellow I am;" and she produced from under the wagon seat two short-jointed rods. "I keep them in this cart," she said, in response to his questioning look at the same time handing him one, and then proceeding to rig the other for herself. "Did you suppose I was good for nothing except to play the high born lady? Why, I've waded this brook, and well above my knees too, time and again! And we will take home some trout, for dinner. Or perhaps you've never cast a fly with bushes about?" she queried, looking slyly at him out of the corner of her eye. "You must know that no bait fishing is allowed on my domains."

For two hours they fished the brook's meandering course with exceptional success, though hers was the better luck. Generally they were near together, chatting and talking the same merry banter which had been their wont when youthful playmates. Ofttimes they were strangely silent; or, she softly singing betimes, while he whistled in accord.

"There," she said, after piloting him around a swampy place, "we have only this one pool left, and that the best.

I mean to beat you this time, too. What will you wager?"

"Anything you like."

"I'll think it over."

"Same here—the winner to choose the forfeit," he agreed eagerly.

"Something very little then—wee and nice, remember," and she raised a warning finger. "So tiny, you know, that if I win I can have it for a keepsake—and before you go?"

"Yes—to be sure;" and she noted the doubt on his face. "That is," he added in a bantering tone, "if you won't—won't—"

" 'Back down' you were going to say? For shame!" and she laid her finger lightly on his lips. "Now, do you go up there at the head and I'll stay here. For forty casts apiece!"

And soon, from opposite ends of the long deep pool, they were skilfully whipping the surface, Jack this time seeing to it that he did not lose.

"There's forty for me, and you have won!" she said at the end, a bewitching pout on her red lips. "Well, cast up my dues, and I'll promise to pay them in full—when I get home—like a little man;" and disjointing her rod she led the way, across lots through the pathless alders, to the wagon.

"And tell me truly—has it not been a gloriously happy day," she cried when they were again in the library, her face beaming with pleasure. "And you will never think unkindly of me again—will you? I could not bear it—nor to have you the least bit unhappy."

He looked at her with a light in his eyes that her own

fully reflected, but held himself in check—knowing his worship hopeless.

"There is a happiness at once sweet and bitter," he returned at last, wearily—"which recognises no experience. It cannot be defined. Why need I repeat in words that I adore—worship you; think of you by day, dream of you by night?"

"Please don't talk in that way," she said, retreating from him, though her voice was soft and tender. And then smiling tearfully up into his face, she continued:

"At first we did not understand each other rightly—you and I. And I being naturally stiff-necked and somewhat obdurately proud, was pretty generally antagonistic, disagreeable—yes, simply nasty to you—and without excuse. I am very sorry, more sorry than I can possibly express in words. I would do almost anything to make you really happy."

She paused; when he bent eagerly toward her—the table between them—and about to throw every restraint to the winds.

"No, no"—she said, motioning him back. "Do not deny what I said, but rather forgive me. What I yearn for is your esteem, your respect. And stay where you are, I beg you—please," she urged, one hand pressed to her breast. "It were folly for me to pretend I am blind to what you would say. But you must not, shall not imperil that perfect trust I have in you, and which now means so much to us both, so much more than you can possibly imagine."

It was several seconds before she continued, more calmly:

"I ask you to believe me, when I say that I know your story, and what you have felt your duty was. I know,

only too well, what has saddened and embittered your life. I know all you have done—from first to last. Don't ask me how this knowledge came to me. That is immaterial, now. But I do know it all—the cruel desertion, the anxiety, the years of chivalrous sacrifice, the humiliation."

And gliding to where he stood, and placing her hand gently on his shoulder, she continued: "I dare not tell you about myself—not yet. But if you see breakers ahead, trust me. Say you will."

He read deeply into the great dark eyes upturned so fearlessly to his own. Yet despite her confidence, it was just as well, perhaps, that he saw beyond the open window some one approaching the house.

"I must," he told her, "when you dare so to trust me."

She would have dropped her hands, had he not, taking them in his, detained her.

"Please to let me go," she said a little stiffly, and throwing up her head.

For an instant his action hung in the balance.

"I will if you so insist," he then answered, releasing her. "But have you forgotten our wager? You lost, and I was to name the forfeit."

She laughed uneasily, moving further apart from him.

"Yes; and you will have plenty of time to consider it."

"It was to be anything the winner chose," he persisted, "and as soon as we returned."

"But very, very tiny," she admitted, slightly hanging her head, though the sweetest smile played on her lips as her eyes met his.

"Tell me what it is, and I'll try to find it now."

"It's a forfeit you might prefer to give—when—I was unconscious of its payment."

She started, for some seconds looking sharply at him.

"Oh!—Johnny—the—horrible—outrageous—little wretch!" she gasped—"And after giving me his solemn promise! But what nonsense! That of course was the most natural impulse in the world; just prompted by anxiety, and the surroundings, and—but—Oh!" and she laughed softly to herself.

Suddenly, coming close to him, her face paled, and she grew strangely earnest as their eyes met.

"Yes, I'll pay the forfeit. But it is no joke. There is nothing between you and me to be called a joke," she whispered, her voice tense and vibrating. "Thank God for it, then. And just for a life's keepsake!" And before he suspected her intent, her lips were close pressed to his, when drawing quickly back she escaped to her room.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HONEYMOON

NOT till dinner was announced did Catherine return to the library—where she found Jack waiting for her.

"There!" she cried, gaily sweeping into the room, the dimples playing on her flushed cheeks, and her eyes brilliant. "See how I try to honour my knight of the Refuge!" with which she dropped him a low courtesy. "And tell me, right away, that you just love my new dress; and, what is more to the point, that it is vastly becoming, too. I put it on solely for your benefit." She was robed in a low cut, soft, white, dainty material; her sole ornament a rope of pearls, whose lustre against the fine white skin but enhanced the delicate loveliness of her full, exquisite neck, and long tapering arms.

"You are absolutely divine," he murmured, daring to express his admiration no further, and her maid loitering in the distance.

"Mr. Rheinlander has not arrived?"

"Not yet. We will go in without him." As she preceded him through the hall, she whispered archly over her shoulder:

"And you are admiring it still. I was quite sure you would approve."

"As you know I do everything else about you. But I was not thinking of the dress," he said, smiling wistfully into the depths of her splendid eyes, still thrilled with a light whose measure he did not yet rightly apprehend.

When they sat down at either end of the small well appointed table, Catherine strove to be as natural and entertaining as she knew how. The life at the Grange was usually quite simple. Thus Jack could not fail to notice how carefully the table was decorated on this occasion, and the evident pains that had been taken with the somewhat elaborate dinner served them.

"Now you are to admire everything," she told him, when they were alone for a moment. "It is all for your special benefit."

"For mine?"

"Yes—and for both of us—I hope. You will have to realise in future what an important person you have become at the Grange—rescuing a forlorn and lonely maiden, the daughter of the house. Don't you see that you own every one and everything, from the mistress down?"

He laughed heartily at this, saying:

"Oh, that's what's the matter, is it? Ever since I came I have felt sort of self conscious. I couldn't make out whether the repressed grin on the different faces was at my expense, or not. I've looked at least twice in the glass, to see if I had a smooch on my face!"

She appeared greatly entertained, though not meeting his eye—her colour coming and going. "And why, pray, shouldn't they smile all they please? There's nothing they wouldn't do for you, this blessed day. And father! Really I am quite jealous there,—though I have a beautiful way of teasing him now. A single word at you, and he rises like a trout to a fly."

"Be merciful," he laughed; and once more gave himself up wholly to a charm which completely swayed and infatuated him.

When, however, the dinner over, she took his arm as

they crossed the hall, she quickly let it drop—and preceded him through the low windows of the library, opening on the western porch. Here, at her mute suggestion, he seated himself on the upper step; she choosing the lowest and directly beneath. For awhile neither spoke—both silently looking through the gloaming towards the distant mountains, towering into a sky where the stars were slowly gathering one by one. A light breeze, fresh from the wooded hills, blew soft and cool, filling the air with the fragrant, soothing odour of balsam, and attuning with gentle rustle the vines and shrubs.

"'The June is with me,'" she quoted . . . "'and the rosebud, glistening where the calyx droops. I feel so young, so strong, so full of God!'"

Close by the porch, a standard bush held amidst its clusterings one large double rose, just bursting into scarlet bloom. Leaning forward he plucked it off, and removing the thorns, bent over and dropped it in her lap. She raised the flower to her face, pressing it to her lips and inhaling its bloom, when—a tear drop on its petals—she looked up at him through her long dark lashes, her soul in her eyes. Smiling she placed the rose in her bosom. Then with a sigh, and slightly shivering, she rose slowly to her feet, saying:

"Let us come inside. There is something I must tell you."

With compressed lips, her limbs trembling, she mounted the steps, and moving towards the library beckoned him to follow. Motioning him to be seated, she turned off all the lights, except one burning on the centre table.

"It is pleasanter so, don't you think?"

For a minute or more she walked restlessly about the room, nervously arranging this and that, till, with set determined face, she placed herself close by his side.

"Yes, I want to tell you something—and about myself," she began very calmly, though her voice was dry and hard.

"I see this is making you unhappy. Don't go on if it distresses you," he told her, noting the agitation she was struggling to overcome. She hesitated; and then summoning all her courage continued:

"Yes, but the pain is not only in the telling, and you must listen. I hope, oh, I am sure, that what I have to say is going—bye and bye—to make us both happy. It is only very hard for me to tell it all; and I know it will distress, perhaps anger you—at the first. Wait patiently till I am through, and it will all come out right."

"Very well, then."

"Once upon a time," she began slowly, "there lived a little girl,—not much to look upon—a lady born, though country bred; her surroundings, the fields and forests; her neighbours, border folk. Her knowledge of the great world was mostly limited to what she gathered from her books. She had no mother. Apart from her own household, her social life was chiefly restricted to a few dear friends, her father's age. To this there was one exception. She gloried in a boy, older than herself, strong, kindly, manly and good to look upon. The two, day after day during his vacations, traversed the wild by brook and fen, as this day you and I roamed and played—she, to dream of it at night, to worship him more and more. Finally, with bated breath she began to listen for his coming footsteps, with a longing more natural to maturer years—and she herself but an unconventional, trusting child. Your face tells me that I need not speak of still another—who also shared their pleasures."

"What? But your imagination is running wild!"

"Yet you know what I say is true. I learned it from

yourself, and from her as well. Come with me. I will show you, how."

She led him to her former boudoir, a room he had never entered since the parson died—except that day when having leased the premises, he had with his own hand dismantled the walls of the many pictures of himself and Kate. How well he remembered everything—the room itself, the paper, the furniture; its last associations, when the young bride implored him to take his freedom. She drew his attention to the photographs—now in their old time places.

"Is not the history of the two written in those prints?" she asked. "Do they not tell all?"

"But in what way—how—"

"Came I by them, you would say? Why I trespassed on forbidden ground, and purloined them from the attic, to be sure;" and she smiled mischievously at his astonishment. "Why not? The walls looked so lonely without them! Do you mind? Indeed would you not suppose it a penance, to have so attached a pair always under my eyes—for me to share you with such a child? Now don't be angry with me. And see what further tales that rustic stand, that basket tells!" And going to the window, which she threw open to the still night; and waving her hand towards the vast panorama of hill and dale shimmering beneath the bright full moon:

"What adventurous happy days they must have had, that boy and girl; penetrating the wild forests, searching out its secrets, lunching by its streams! Oh! what happy, happy children they were!" She stopped, catching her breath, and then continued:

"All this was before the trouble came. The first act has but one scene left. I will give my imagination full scope, and tell you of that. One day, innocently enough,

while masquerading in childish sport, they played a bridal ceremony—to find their mock marriage a reality. Then, the girl's tender years demanding, the two separated for a season. Close to the appointed time the girl disappeared, after writing the boy with bitter upbraiding. Year after year, a half score or more, he waited patiently. She never came. But he was a rarely loyal—a knightly man. In spite of time, desertion, disappointment and humiliation, he continued to honour the memory of what she once had been. This also proves how much he really loved the child. But if still alive, the present woman would be an utter stranger—and yet his lawful wife. Then another, vastly different, trained to the world, an heiress, influential, proud, self-willed, fairly fair, came into his life. Of the two it would be hard to say which loved him the more. As for himself, he was helplessly bound, fettered by the possibility that his wife was still alive."

"Who told you of this?" Jack cried in dismay. Then realising that she had more to tell, he demanded feverishly: "But go on, go on!"

She moved close to him and rested one bare arm across his neck and shoulders; with caressing, lingering hand, stroking back the hair curling on his temples.

"It all happened the night she went to meet you, dear;" she said very low, speaking slowly and with laboured breath. "She stayed too long at the wharves—then wandered about, was lost, drugged, kidnapped. Afterwards a woman named Norna Boudré rescued her, uninjured from an evil place—no, no, I implore you, don't interrupt—and later told her that—*'John Ingersoll'* was her husband, and not Kate's, offering a marriage certificate in proof. This last was dated at Newcastle, near which place Kate knew you to have been at the

time. A wallet, too, was found among his effects, a sentimental keepsake, worked by the girl and which the boy had sworn to cherish. I have learned since coming here that the boy lost it near the garden at the Grange. This same devil, who was present at the time, must have picked it up and kept it. Oh! many a circumstance, each dovetailing with the rest, made the proof overwhelming to the girl that the boy's life was that of a debased, degenerate hypocrite. There was no room left for doubt that you had played her false. Remember, dear, that she was but a child—motherless, fatherless. Remember how she adored her hero—now suddenly revealed to her guileless mind as the veriest blackguard. Think of her pride, her sensitiveness, her hero worship! How all were trampled in the dust! Say, oh, say you refuse to judge her harshly!—Say you rather pity, forgive, and love her!" She paused for breath. Then as Jack, trembling and with wide-staring eyes, was struggling to speak, she laid her hand lightly on his mouth, and moved closer to him, her hair brushing his cheek. "No! No! Not yet. Let me finish, dear. Come—first look with me in this mirror."

"What is it you see?" she began, her voice gathering strength. "Oh, you see a royal man. He has proved himself such. He has conquered in a hard, bitter fight, and against perilous odds. He is of that sort a woman loves—nay, worships. But tell me—what else do you see?" she persisted, holding firmly to him, while the tears glistened under her long lashes.—"Nothing but a woman,—a mere weak woman, still. Who is she? Oh you've known her from the first! Do you tell her by the 'vantage of her airs,' or 'her crown, or her gown, or anything she wears?' Is she thin, or pale, or freckled? Has she not eyes to be seen—if only answering the light in

yours? Is she crowned with white as you saw her last?" Rapidly she unfastened and let down her wealth of shimmering glorious hair, and carelessly tossing back its wavy mass, twined her arms about his neck, straining him to her bosom, and devouring him with eager, passionate eyes. "Oh, your heart, your heart, 'in holy harmony with hers,' has known her from the first. Tell me, tell me quickly," she sobbed, clinging frantically to him, "that she is your darling wife—your sweetheart, too—the both in one! This is her birthday—hers and mine—I tell you! Say that you forgive her—that you cannot live without her—that you want me—want me! Don't look at me like that! Oh, God! Ah! Do you know me now? Hold me tightly—tighter still—always to your very heart. Yes—yes—It is Kiddie, Jack—your Kate!"

THE END